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YULE FIRE

A COLLECTION OF POEMS OF CHRISTMAS TIME TAKEN FROM ALL PERIODS IN OUR OWN LITERATURE AND THAT OF ENGLAND, WITH AN INTRODUCTION TELLING HOW THE YULE FIRE BURNS BRIGHTER THAN ANY OTHER FOR ANY PERSON AND FOR ALL MANKIND.

YULE FIRE

MARGUERITE WILKINSON

Decorated by
George M. Richards

Granger Poetry Library

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Carol, New Style . . . . . *Stephen Vincent Benét*
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YULE FIRE

THE Yule Fire of which I write was never kindled in any resinous log from a forest of stalwart trees. It is warmer than flames leaping red and golden on any hearth. It is brighter than the "red flower" that grew in the dark jungle of Mowgli and frightened the beasts. It is dearer even than the finest fire that Prometheus was ever able to snatch out of the heavens. The Yule Fire was born into this world in Bethlehem years ago and burns forever in Jesus Christ.

Exactly when the birthday was nobody knows. Perhaps men and angels allowed the date of the birth of Jesus to be forgotten because, in deepest truth, the event was timeless. It came into the sequence of circumstance which we know as life from a world where the future and the past are one, where life says I AM in the grand, inclusive present tense of Godhead. That the incarnation actually did take place in our world, which is wont to use the boundaries of time and space, is a reality so overmastering that it quite suffices without minor details for the minds and hearts that have accepted and declared it. If the radiance of the mystery does not awaken in others a sense of actuality, then a mere date would not win them.

Had Jesus been ambitious with such crude ambition as built the pyramids, the date of His birth might have been graven on stone for the gratification of curiosity. We know the dates of many of the Pharaohs, and are content to forget them! But

Christ did not use the labor of slaves to build a proclamation of His own importance. He labored Himself for us, courteously desiring to be written down in our hearts if we should will it. Therefore the exact knowledge of the day of the beginning of His manifestation in time may be disregarded. He is not of time, but of eternity. He is not Pharaoh, but Emanuel. He was not only born long ago in Bethlehem of a young girl who had her travail on the hard floor of a stable. He is incarnate repeatedly in the lives of men and women who, although they suffer the limitations of this temporal world, belong also, to some extent and in certain aspects of their being, to a world that is invisible, but everlasting and supremely real. And though nobody knows the exact date of the birth of Jesus, out of love for Him a new calendar was made.

The things that are told us of His coming are the things that love remembers—the betrothal, the angelic visitation, the Almighty overshadowing, a journey, a birth in a stable, shepherds and angels, wise men and a star. The story comes to us in words of imponderable delicacy and simplicity, words that no poet could achieve save by the inspiration of deep personal tenderness. Therefore I shall not muddy the dayspring of this limpid archaic beauty by any attempt to give the Bible narrative in words of my own.

But of His reiterated incarnation in His followers, the living branches forever fed by the Vine, enough is not said in these days. Certain intellectuals are interested in mysticism, to be sure, for, having been governed overlong by the attempt to reduce life to its lowest level through so-called scientific analyses, and to keep it there by the resultant inhibitions of the spiritual life, they suffer a vague and partial consciousness of the starva-

tion of their souls and cry out for the bread of life that mysticism gives. But, being as they are, the heirs of negation, and finding popular Christian orthodoxy dull and tepid both in doctrine and practice (which it often is) they tend to evade the implications of a Christian mysticism that has its roots deep in ethics and demands of itself a harvest of ethical fruits, preferring a pseudo-mysticism invalidated by lack of discipline and vulgarized by curiosity. Such mysticism is close akin to magic and may become pathological. It substitutes weak excitation, a form of emotional self-indulgence, for that clean ecstasy of the saint which must always be a given thing and may not be given at all even in a lifetime of holiness.

This pseudo-mysticism can never do anything better than demonstrate its own falsity. It is an attempt to cheat God, for it would seek the central truth, beauty, and sanctity of the universe without obedience to them. It would pry into the secrets of the law it will not cherish. Yet if the life of Christians be lacking in vital warmth, they cannot blame others for warming themselves at baleful fires.

While modern intellectuals outside of the churches are dabbling in various kinds of mysticism for the satisfaction of vague longings which they do not understand, Christian modernists who desire something more vital than popular orthodoxy, something less sentimental, are following with courage and sacrifice and hope a man of Nazareth who died long ago. They ask themselves what He really did and said, what He would have them do now *if He were here.* They wonder, being few in number, what they can do to win an indifferent and negligent world to the sounder understanding of human needs which they have achieved by studying Him. In spite of their efforts and their

obvious sincerity they are often frustrate. When reformers fail may it not be because, though they are indeed spiritual aristocrats, they forget the ever-present beauty, and are as partial and incomplete as the pseudo-mystics who forget ethics, though in a far less dangerous way? With all their rationalism do they not forget that the rest of us are not such rationalists? Do they not also need a sense of the supremely lovable Person, with us now and always? Their religion has strong form and sound substance which we cannot but honor. Yet it lacks radiance and color and movement. It is the equestrian statue of what might be an athlete on a galloping horse.

The adoration of an invincible Person is the true dynamic of Christianity. Without it Christianity must always be ineffectual, insipid, and unchristian; ineffectual because only a few of us are brave enough or wise enough to follow a dead Master; insipid because it cannot rouse the imagination and sublimate the instinctive energies; and unchristian because, after all, Christianity is merely the possession of the living Christ. Therefore the challenge rings out to the gates of power:—

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in!

And the challenge is answered with a question—

Who is the King of Glory?

And the cry goes back triumphantly,

The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.

Christianity has never been powerful save when it answered with that ringing cry, perceiving in its mighty Founder the very image of the Lord of Hosts. Because they have so found Him, the saints have been men and women of spiritual prowess. He did

not merely live once that we might copy Him. He lives that we may follow. He is not ashes. He is the Yule Fire!

When it burns in haloes around the faces on Broadway and in a pillar of fire moving across the land on the Santa Fé Trail and in rosy beacons on the flanks of the great sierras, America will be great in ways that she does not know now, in ways that she once dreamed and has almost forgotton; and the things that seem great to many of us now will then seem very small indeed.

Many disciples have known Him always as their friend. They are the children of good fortune. To others He is born "in the fullness of time." He may come with the touch of healing and the tone of peace when the tree of life has been cleft and seared by sharp-edged lightnings of agony. He may appear on a radiant summit of perception when the things that are lovely are very near. He may be made manifest tenderly to one who is feeling for the first time the compunction that takes an insult in silence rather than wound another by returning it. He may draw near to a soul that has given up a precious thing for love of another human soul, perhaps only a flower or a small purse, perhaps a greatly desired experience.

So He was born in the tramp whose story Ridgely Torrence tells in his exquisite and eloquent *"Eye-Witness."* When this tramp turned away from his night-fire beside the railroad track and left it to a comrade because he "couldn't find the warming-room for two," Jesus came to him in silvery vision:

My heart went open like an apple sliced;
I saw my Savior and I saw my Christ.

The whole of it can never be told. The best that can be done is to let a look, a word, an act, a poem, show something of the agony and glory of this mysterious new birth in order that

people everywhere may know that it is real, in order that they may have a clue to the meaning of the betrothal of the spirit to the Spirit, of the angelic annunciation and the Almighty overshadowing without which no new life enters into us, of the journey of the individual soul to its Bethlehem, and the travail and humiliation, of the strange, sweet, fresh power that comes in like the singing of angels and with the shining of far stars. It is only the beginning. A road leads from Bethlehem to Calvary for nearly all of us. Much must be learned always, and much must be borne. But it is one more Christmas, one more birthday of the Light of the World, of which the soul cries out in paradoxes:

Out of the troubled dark I came
Into bright silence where I heard a Name
Sounded without a voice.
Time narrowed then
Into an instant, and the world of men
Rolled into space and left me to rejoice
In solitude that was not solitude;
And quietly my spirit was renewed
While through and through and over and under all
The Name was sounded, call upon ringing call.

Time widened out into eternity;
Power was upon me so that I could see
Light beyond light, rivers of silver flowing,
Sheer lakes of rosy and golden color, blowing
Torrents of tumbled glory, amber and green,
White rays impetuous, violet pools serene,
And a broad azure tide whose waves are curled
Around the margins of the farthest world.
Light followed darkness, and time died; for me
Silence was crying out of mystery,

"Oh, bow and worship, bend you and adore,
God is forevermore.
All marvel of vision overwhelming sight
Is but one darkened threshhold of His light
Where by His mercy on your lowly star
One small door of His Heaven stands ajar."

Though it is an old story it is told over and over again from age to age because it must needs be told if the world is ever to believe it. The world believes an ugly thing on the first hearing, but is slow to accept what is supremely beautiful. Why should it always be difficult to believe the beauty which is in itself an assurance of the truth? Why should it seem strange to us that the dullest person in the world can be newly born into himself, perhaps into love and danger and vision and adventure?

So it may well be often. For there is a soul that is like a dark cavern of ice hidden under gloomy shadows. Stubborn walls of frigid unillumined thought shut out the day and it is inhabited by weird blinking gnomes of doubt and hobgoblins of fear. Then the day comes when a huge column of ice guarding the entrance is broken by life and falls. The Yule Fire goes in. Soon the icy walls glisten with ten thousand prismatic hues passing through them, and many rays reveal the peculiar loveliness of pattern which has always belonged to that one soul alone in the whole universe. They pass through every open space of clear purity and transparent honesty. They transform the gnomes and hobgoblins into winged dreams, emerald and amber and azure, rising serenely through the nights and days. Little by little the cavern that was dark and forbidding becomes a luminous palace for the King.

And there is a soul like a sour pond in late summer. All

growing things that stand near have sucked up the life-giving water drop by slow drop. The small rillets that fed the pond in springtime no longer run into it, for they have been exhausted near their sources. There is no outlet now, for the pond is so shrunken that it is hemmed in by its own banks. It has lost the cool sweetness that once made it lovable. On the surface float festering masses of scum. The feel of the water is slimy and the odor of it is stale. The sky is a cruel fever above it. All this the pond realizes and tries to forget. But a day comes when it can forget no longer and cries out to Heaven. Then Heaven is opened above it and Jesus gives the water of life. The rillets come singing down the slopes of time again to the margins of the pond, silvery and miraculous. Their clean, cool tinkling fills the pond so that the sour waters are sweetened as they rise higher and higher against the stiff banks of clay that have held them in; and finally there is a swift, releasing overflow, and the scum on the surface of the pond is drained away, and the pond faces Heaven clear enough to reflect the light in the eyes of a baby.

And the birth of Jesus Christ is also in this wise. He is born to souls grown lean with terrible hunger because they have been fed on stones, and to souls that are barren, weedy gardens, bearing no fruit though the soil is rich, and to courageous souls that have been scourged for His sake without truly knowing Him, and to souls like prisoners in jails, inhibited and furious, and to souls like the charnel-house. And when He comes hunger is fed, the barren gardens bear fruit, stripes of agony become badges of honor, freedom is given in exchange for bondage, and all uncleanness is washed away in the white current of love.

For His birth in us is sweeter than the savor of all wholesome food, of clean grain from the prairies and wild sage honey

from the mesas, and it is of richer flavor than any keen wine. The glory of Him is every splendid hue of dawn, and every shade of arcane beauty in the "many-colored land" of which A. E. tells us. His voice is lovelier than the music of Orpheus. His touch is gentle, but under it the soul leaps and marches and dances. His love is more fragrant, even at first, than the earth in a thick forest at night, than a breeze whirling inland from a great salt ocean. What it is to His saints we dare not guess! He is more than all these things to the soul that surrenders. He is an imperative call to battle and a first claim upon honor. He is a gateway into that invisible world which we sometimes speak of as Heaven, hardly realizing that it is near us all the time. When we have done our petty selves to death for His sake, or perhaps even when we have struck a feeble first blow against our own littleness, He opens the gates and bids us find our greater selves in His own country and in Him.

I have said that the Light of the World entering into a human soul, makes clear in that soul the peculiar pattern which is unique and cannot be changed. It cannot even be curtailed or evaded with impunity. By finding the Yule Fire we die to our false selves, but live more vividly in our true selves. The latent becomes actual in us. The potential is gradually raised toward the highest power. The hod-carrier moves his arms with more dexterity, the housewife bakes bread more expertly, the statesman thinks more far-sightedly, and the poet sings more fluently and passionately when he has found the Yule Fire. For that ineffable and indefinable thing which we call personality, which we love in our friends, is more like itself than ever it was before.

But that is not all. The Yule Fire glowing inwardly may make the hod-carrier a sage, the housewife a saint, the statesman

a hero, and the poet a master-genius by adding the flavor and the picturesque gesture of the unique to what is natural and universal in them. Pygmies who cherish the Yule Fire may become giants. And we need giants in our country to-day. We need a new Socrates, Isaiah, St. Francis, Michael Angelo and Shakespeare. We need extraordinary people to enlarge life for the ordinary ones.

Not long ago I heard somebody read a sermon on "the courage of the commonplace" by George Hodges. It was a fine and valuable effort to encourage the ordinary man in the pursuit of ordinary virtues. But in a civilization that tends toward the standardization of human values in all institutions, toward the rapid coordination of masses of people for the easy and convenient accomplishment of purely utilitarian ends, toward a dull, colorless, inert uniformity in thought, desire, and action, we have an even greater need of sermons on the courage that is not of the commonplace. It is time to dig the ore from the rare veins of most precious metal in the common rock and make of it singular and exquisite vehicles for the spiritual life of the nation. And we shall be safe in so doing if only we remember that all personalities in this one little life are necessarily partial—even the greatest. We shall not be in danger of snobbery if we remember that it "does not yet appear what we shall be" in that portion of eternity which we have not yet explored.

The coming of Jesus brings new powers. It is not merely that the influx of His love increases compassion for all hurt and sorry things, for the queer and the soiled and the forsaken, though this may be the largest gain for the soul that has been self-centered. It is not merely that new energy is given and asks a chance to labor. It is not merely that the soul learns a new knowledge of good and evil by looking deep through faults and

failures and sorrows to hidden motives and causes, and by trying to lift aside, one by one, the thick and stifling veils of sin that hide Him. It is not merely that sensitivity to falsehood and truth, ugliness and beauty, mercy and anger are sharpened, so that much becomes sin which never troubled the conscience in the days before enlightenment. Jesus brings subtle and delicate powers less easily defined and described than any of these. Sometimes He opens the walls of consciousness for His children so that the thoughts and feelings of others flow in upon them. Sometimes He shows them vivid pictures of their own inner lives, of their ideas and emotions. He warns them of danger by revealing the crude desires that wallow like swine and fight like leopards. In matters that nearly affect them He makes them inwardly aware of what is happening. Sometimes He lets them feel and answer the prayers of those who love them. He advises and suggests. He speaks delicately in many a mood and incident. He tells terrible truths suddenly and grants sure insight slowly. To no two souls, the saints tell us, does He ever give just the same gifts in just the same way, but for each and all there is an enhancement of power. And it seems to me that it is a legitimate test of any religion to ask what it can do. As A. E. says in that rich and lovely book, "The Candle of Vision," "The religion which does not cry out: 'I am to-day verifiable as that water wets or fire burns. Test me that ye can become as gods.' Mistrust it. Its messengers are prophets of darkness."

During His life on earth Jesus gave richly to His followers of all verifiable powers. He still gives them so richly that it is easier for the beginner to doubt them than to believe until either use or misuse, victories or blunders, have proved them real. And so the new birth, which adds enormously to the vigor and beauty

of life, may be utterly bewildering at first, and days of trial may follow the days of illumination. It is only after the soul has learned to trust and use the new powers to a certain extent, after the days of trial have brought a certain measure of understanding, that Jesus can lead on into a "wealthy place." Then the soul hails Him as the eternal Lord of all loveliness, clad a little while in our flesh that we might wear His spirit to all eternity.

I take this thought from the great mystics. I am not going back to the orthodox literalness of the quaint little old carol that thanks God for the fall of man as if man owed the incarnation to the fall and as if God could not have devised anything else so good for us to take its place if we had not fallen! It seems to me to be odd theology, that carol, but delicious poetry:

Adam lay ibounden,
Bounden in a bond
Four thousand winter
Thought he not too long.
And all was for an appil,
An appil that he tok,
As clerkes finden
Wreten in here bok.
Ne hadde the appil take ben,
The appil take ben,
Ne hadde never Our Lady
A ben heavene quene.
O blessed be that time
The appil take was;
Therefore we moun singen
Deo gracias!

An impartial consideration of our own characters and of the strife and sorrow in the world at large should be sufficient to

convince us that we are indeed flawed and fallen. But is it not even truer to think of our sins as a regression toward an earlier condition of life when man lived under the law of the jungle and had not learned even the tribal laws of his kind, much less the law of Christ? Is it not even truer to think that we are forever rising and going forward, sometimes by painful climbing, sometimes as if with the tremendous wings of a vast flight, toward the kind of God that we love? Is it not certain that the cycles of time have known their great renewals, the upward thrust of life when humanity was born out of an animal world, and again when divinity was perfectly born into humanity with the coming of the Yule Fire?

The visitor in the invisible world, the sensitive new disciple in the spiritual life, soon begins to be conscious of the ascendng trend of the soul. That is one reason why the Christian who sins suffers incomparably more than an agnostic under similar conditions. That wise mediaeval anchoress, Lady Julian of Norwich, who wrote the homely and delightful narrative of her experience with Christ, called the "Revelations of Divine Love," says trenchantly,

To me was shown no harder Hell than sin.

But if the new Christian finds that his pain in sin is deepened, so also he discovers that his ability to perceive virtue is quickened and his joy in it heightened. He learns that it is what he loves in his friends, and, if he be great enough, in his enemies. And he finds sweetness and peace in reaching new levels of insight and prowess himself.

For the soul in which the life of Jesus is evolving is not merely saved as from an old-fashioned Hell mechanically thought out in terms of time and space and substance. That were a sal-

vation too small for His generosity. But such a soul becomes an incarnation of His Spirit according to its own kind and capacity, an inward altar on which the Yule Fire is lighted. If the flames prosper, their ardor will be communicated to others. Such ardor is compelling in the words of saints who died centuries ago. It was after reading the great Spanish mystics, Saint Teresa, and Luis de Leon, and Ramon Lull that Muna Lee wrote the following sonnet:

There is a joy I have not known, a splendor
That never flashed across my darkened heart.
There is a bliss in which I have no part
Of passionate welcome and of rapt surrender.
It is the Vision, terrible and tender,
Whose ecstasies Teresa's songs impart;
The spring from which Luis's praises start;
The Fire and Dew that Ramon's altars render.

Yet even I, the cold and blind, have been
Led by an echo toward the Holy Wood,
Hearing the Voice that thrilled its sentient air
And, as an alien at its edge I stood,
Afar within its depths I too have seen
The star that glitters on the lilies there.

Such ardor comes like Christ and with Him from the invisible world of timeless reality. Only those who visit in that world can fully sympathize with others who go there. For people who seldom enter the world of the spirit are living in rooms that have walls and ceilings, but no floors. In times of stress they may fall through the rafters into darkness. But people who are at home in the world of the spirit are living always in rooms that have walls and good stout floors, but no ceilings. In times of

stress they can look straight up toward Heaven. Therefore the two kinds find it difficult to understand each other. That may be why Christians, being in the minority, have tribulation in this world. If we are not misinterpreted sometimes, it may be because we lack the Yule Fire. All who would live the glad tidings, all who would tell them, should have the hot joy of the Yule Fire in their hearts and on their tongues. It may be kept through all tribulation!

Our visible world and the world that we enter with Christ are, in a sense, antithetical. This world sets a premium on a kind of cautious common sense which we may thankfully forget when we enter the higher sphere of being. This world is often amused at spiritual enthusiasm and praises conformity, conventionality, and respectability. But the world wherein sages and prophets shine to each other like many-colored suns translates spiritual enthusiasm into illustrious thought and action, and with gentle mockery looses us from many of the small rules that love never made and need not keep. This world of our senses is always afraid because it obeys force. But in the world where whirlwinds of archangels greet the martyrs with a tumult of singing the new commandment is "Fear not!" There youth may be assured that Christianity is not merely gentle and peaceful, but that it is also beautiful and thrilling and dangerous because it obeys that new commandment. Here we are sometimes told that men and women sin because they love too much. But in the world where all power in Heaven and earth is given to One Who is all love, no power is given to him who has none. There it is made manifest that to love is to express the highest known form of energy, and that this energy can do harm only when it is directed toward the self. Under all of our sophistries do we not

realize that people sin because they love each other too little and themselves, or their own temporary desires, too much, or else because they do not love God first and each other afterwards? The heavenly love that is found in Christ, is it not like a rainbow arch, rising from the horizon of self toward God, the zenith, and then bending down toward the horizon of the neighbor? I know a few unconscious saints whose love is like this rainbow arch. They are not the victims of complexes. They are not enslaved by the desire to possess all of the objects of their affection. They are content, for the most part, to contemplate and to share.

To me, when I meditate on life, it seems that people are subtly changed after a time, perhaps even transfigured, by contact with the world where love is power. That may be why the anonymous Ante-Nicene Father who wrote the gracious little Epistle to Diognetus said, "What the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world." Hungry, weak, naked, sinful, they may go to Christ in His Heaven to be fed, healed, clad, and comforted. They find no limitation set for His giving save their own desire and capacity to receive and use the gift. His fountains are never stinted. They who drink need never measure the draught of their elation by any fear that the supply is scanty and may fail.

Refreshed by these flashing waters of life, they must necessarily long to change things in the world of the senses as they themselves are changed in the world of the spirit. This may be resented, for some people find inward change more uncomfortable than moving-day even though they know that they would be happier changed. True Christians of my acquaintance try not to quicken this sluggish resentment. Often they pour out their libations quietly where they may long remain unnoticed. They

do not try to make others like themselves for they no longer seem to themselves to fulfil their own ideals and meet their own standards. Moreover, they learn from Christ to value the individual flavor and quality and kind in every human being and to respect all souls not only for what they are, but for what they may become.

But they support the causes He has sponsored in so far as they are able. If they are conventional enough to find their places happily in a Church, they look for something in it that they can foster until it blossoms into a newer and gayer life. If they feel, intuitively, that they belong with the "other sheep" who are "not of this fold" and that their church must be simply "the blessed company of all faithful people," still they find a corner of the world in which they may spend themselves. At all hazards and under all penalties their hearts and minds are set against the trading of privileges, the sale of opinions, the standardization of human beings, the oppression of the poor, the betrayal of the ignorant, the exploitation of the young and maltreatment of the fallen. In war and in peace they are for peace, knowing that all hatred is a violation of the law of that world wherein they find the Yule Fire. I know such women and men. I know saints whose goodness is strong with the tough, limber strength, and sweet with the sharp scent of the evergreen branches that deck our churches at Christmas time. They travel under skies lighted by faith like the star over Bethlehem.

Of that star St. Ignatius, said to be a disciple of the beloved Saint John, once spoke with sweet confidence. He was being led to the arena to be devoured by beasts when he wrote his poetic letters to the churches under his direction. In one of them he says:

A star shone forth in Heaven above all that were before it, and its light was inexpressible, while its novelty struck men with astonishment. And all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star. It far exceeded them all in brightness, and agitation was felt as to whence this new spectacle proceeded. Hence worldly wisdom became folly, conjuration was seen to be mere trifling, and magic became utterly ridiculous. Every law of wickedness vanished away; the darkness of ignorance was dispersed; and tyrannical authority was destroyed, God being manifested as a man, and man displaying power as God.

As we all know, the faith of the Christians in that first century of the glad tidings was so strong that they thought of things hoped for as if they were things accomplished. Yet to-day it is not made clear to everybody that wordly wisdom is folly! Conjuration with much superstition and occult quackery has flourished since the war, deluding many who desire a religious knowledge and experience, but are unwilling to pay for them in the coin of prayer and discipline and effort, the only coin that can buy them. People who tolerate the ouija board can hardly be said to have given up magic. In the world of letters minds like dark comets, having furious force, but no light, rush through the times in an endeavor to shatter all laws of gentleness, honor, delicacy, and discrimination. Not every law of wickedness is vanished away while children labor still for the support of adults. Ignorance is not yet dispersed when teachers of upright character are tried in courts for their opinions. Tyrannical authority has not passed away where the effort to make everybody like everybody else through propaganda has gone so far that in certain circles it is regarded as a crime to differ in opinion from anybody! We are not yet free with the freedom of children of God. But with regard to one thing we may still echo the words of St. Ignatius.

God has been manifested as man in Jesus, and wherever we find anybody following Him whole-heartedly, we find the power of God displayed to create and save. In homes where the Yule Fire burns are babies as lovely as blossoms, young girls like white birches, and young boys like maple saplings. Was it not said in audacious symbols long ago by that "true gnostic," Clement of Alexandria, that Jesus is the guide of youth? I quote his "Hymn To The Savior."

Bridle of colts untamed
Over our wills presiding,
Wing of unwandering birds
Our flight securely guiding,
Rudder of youth unbending,
Firm against adverse shock,
Shepherd with wisdom tending
Lambs of the royal flock,
Thy simple children bring
Together; let them sing
In solemn lays
Their hymns of praise
With guileless lips to Christ their King.

It is inspiriting to call to mind sometimes what is obviously true whenever we think of it, that what the Yule Fire, burning in a single soul, can do for that soul, it could do also for the whole world if the world would so have it. If only mankind might see on Christmas the vision of the "burning babe" of Robert Southwell and answer the passionate cry of that divine loneliness:

but newly born
In fiery heats I fry,
Yet none approach to warm their hearts
Or feel my fire but I.

If mankind would rise up and say with George Herbert:

I will go searching till I find a sun
Shall stay till we have done;
A willing shiner that shall shine as gladly
As frost-nipt suns look sadly.

Finding that "willing shiner," they would find the Yule Fire. There is no other that will keep life warm for us "till we have done." But God has a good reputation and lives up to it. He could do much more for us if only we expected more of Him.

Sometimes I think we are beginning to expect more. Sometimes I believe that we are on the eve of a religious awakening that may bring in the era of the Spirit. No longer, even in times of war, are we governed by physical force in the muscles of men's arms and legs. This is the era of the ruthless and keen intellect. But there are whispers of a change. Science is learning by reason and experiment many truths that mystics of all ages and races have taught out of their intuitive wisdom and experience. Just as poets came before critics, so the mystics came before the scientists. They are the true discoverers and pioneers. The best of what Freud has taught is foreshadowed by a few sentences in an essay of Emerson, a mystic. Psychoanalysis is only a new kind of confession. Telepathy, when it is understood and explained, will be only a new "communion of saints." When the broad vistas of dream have been thoroughly explored we may be able to interpret once more as in the days of Daniel. And scientific research in educational fields alone may serve to reveal the glory of the law of love. In the days of Jesus many people "asked for a sign" before they would believe. To-day, with more wisdom and more folly, they ask for a proof. But the time will come when the vision will vouch for itself.

Neither the victims of a quiescent willingness to abide forever in the thought of the past rather than go forward and onward and heavenward through painful change and growth (Grant us not peace, but the sword!) nor the erratic victims of a callow, pseudo-scientific rationalism which is yet ignorant of spiritual realities, can become the puissant teachers of an intelligent, but errant modern world. That task awaits the "true gnostics" who, like Clement of Alexandria, realize that all truth belongs to Christ and are not afraid of any of it. They will teach that truth which is in nature as it is in prayer, in science and art as it is in the scriptures, that ancient wisdom which is also universal and eternal because it belongs to the inward and spiritual man. They may not teach it save to those who have ears to hear, who are ready and eager. And perhaps they will find as many of these outside of the churches as inside. But when they come we shall realize once more that Christianity is a religion of power as much as it is a religion of truth and beauty and goodness, a religion of spiritual power great enough to overcome and confound the power that is merely external, material, and temporal.

* * * * * * * * *

Among the first poems in the book are those about Bethlehem. We all know the gentle lyric by Phillips Brooks. It is the poem of a reserved saint rather than of an illuminated poet, and we love it first of all for the sainthood that produced it, then for its quietness and simplicity. The very gesture of the good minister, who knows better than anybody else what silences belong to the soul in travail, is in the lines of the third stanza:

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given.

After the poems about Bethlehem come two lyrics about St. Joseph. Willard Wattles, with fine insight, shows him laboring as a carpenter to shelter the Holy Child and puts into his mind and mouth the realization that he is helping to build Heaven! Elsa Barker describes his humility before the immortal beauty which he guards and cherishes.

The poems about the blessed Mother of Jesus are numerous and vary greatly in thought and manner. I have chosen from among them six which seem most beautiful to me. First there is Rossetti's sonnet on her girlhood with its fine line of characterization,

Strong in grave peace; in pity circumspect.

Next in order I have placed Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's apostrophe to Our Lady. The august human note of it echoes the Magnificat:—

Mother of God! no lady thou:
Common woman of common earth!
Our Lady ladies call thee now,
But Christ was never of gentle birth:

If these lines shock us by their rough candor, perhaps it is well that we should be shocked into remembering that

God's ways are not as our ways.

Then follow two rare, sweet, homely carols of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that describe the elect lady of God as a matchless maiden and the flower of all things. Finally I have included a superb ode called, "Mary Mother of Divine Grace, Compared To The Air We Breathe." It is by an original genius of the ripest tradition of Catholic mysticism, Gerard Hopkins. In it are noble and sentient lines that should find favor even with

protestants who do not altogether accept the doctrine. Such lines are these:—

If I have understood
She holds high motherhood
Towards all our ghostly good
And plays in grace her part
About man's beating heart,
Laying like air's fine flood
The death-dance in his blood.

And again he says:—

Bethlehem or Nazareth,
Men here may draw like breath
More Christ, and baffle death;
Who, born so, comes to be
New self and nobler me.

The poems of expectation come next, including an exquisitely womanly lyric by Alice Meynell. Then come the poems that tell of the birth. Of these none is dearer than the carol by Louise Imogen Guiney whose human passion speaks in archaic language:—

But wo'd to-night my Teares were there,
Amen. Amen!
Between her Bosom and His hayre!

Many of the finest old carols are written with naive objectivity on the themes of the star and the angels, the shepherds and the wise men. They are perennially charming in their own quaint way. Here also is Christina Rossetti's profound and delicate carol, probably as perfect a poem as was ever written about Christmas. How poignant is the stanza that contrasts omnipotence with infancy!

Enough for Him whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay:
Enough for Him whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

I have not forgotten the powerful ode of Milton. Perhaps some of the readers of this book will like to have here his own account of the making of it, part of an impressive letter to his friend Charles Diodati. Before mentioning the ode Milton discusses his poetic ideals. Light Elegy, he says, is the care of many gods, and to the poets who make it conviviality is allowable.

But the man who speaks of high matters—the heaven of the full-grown Jove, and pious heroes, and demi-god leaders of men, the man who now sings the holy counsels of the gods above, and now the subterranean realms guarded by the fierce dog—let him live sparely, after the manner of the Samian master; let herbs afford him his innocent diet, let clear water in a beechen cup stand near him, and let him drink sober draughts from a pure fountain! To this be there added a youth chaste and free from guilt, and rigid morals, and hands without stain. Being such, thou shalt rise up, glittering in sacred raiment and purified by lustral waters, an augur about to go into the presence of the unoffended gods.

He goes on to tell of great bards of antiquity who lived this austere life and says:—

For the poet is sacred and the priest of the gods; and his breast and his mouth breathe the indwelling Jove.

No matter how harsh and unchristian much of his theology now

seems to us, ideas like these are immutable and majestic. It is good to know that it was in this same letter that he spoke of the making of his ode for the birthday of Our Lord:—

And now, if you will know what I am myself doing (if indeed you think it is of so much consequence to know if I am doing anything), here is the fact: we are engaged in singing the heavenly birth of the King of Peace, and the happy age promised by the holy books, and the infant cries and cradling in a manger under a poor roof of that God Who rules, with His Father, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the sky with the new-sprung star in it, and the ethereal choir of hymning angels, and the gods of the heathen suddenly fleeing to their endangered fanes. This is the gift which we have presented to Christ's natal day. On that very morning, at daybreak, it was first conceived.

After this great ode by Milton, and after Charles Wesley's famous Christmas hymn, altered in most modern hymnals so that it begins with the line

Hark! the herald angels sing

come a number of poems that make personal application in subjective lyricism of the story of the birth. One is by John Donne who, by the way, also wrote the famous lines about the Holy Communion:—

He was the Word that spake it;
He took the bread and brake it;
And what that Word did make it;
I do believe and take it.

Other poems of the subjective kind that have to do with the story of the incarnation are by William Drummond of Hawthornden, Richard Watson Gilder and George MacDonald. George MacDonald lived much in an invisible world, we learn from his

strange, fairy tale "Phantastes," and he understood the workings of the law of love. His lyric of the birth of Jesus has an incisive eloquence:—

O Son of Man, to right my lot
Naught but Thy presence can avail;
Yet on the roads Thy wheels are not,
Nor on the sea Thy sail!

Michael Fairless in "Out of The Shadow" has a message for all who are sorrowful at Christmas time. Walter de la Mare's ballad lets him seem to be, like Origen of old, a believer in that largest of all doctrines of the love of God which claims that at the last He will forgive us all because all of us will have found Him irresistible and will be turned home to Him.

I have included three delightful poems about the oxen and asses in the stable. Katharine Tynan celebrates the innocence of the animals, Thomas Hardy almost acquiesces in the tradition that they still kneel and pray at twelve o'clock on Christmas Eve, and David Morton suggests what their race must still remember, if it remembers anything:—

A grave distinction they have come to wear,—
Their look gone past us—to a little town,
And a white miracle that happened there.

I like to think how near the domestic animals came to the manger cradle. It seems fitting that the burden-bearers and bounty-givers to mankind should be represented in this great drama of eternal love. But I like also to think that the wild people of the groves and meadows, of the valleys and the wilderness, the shy clans of creatures with gleaming eyes and hot blood and cool wits, clad in dewy fur and glistening feathers, came as near as they dared to the entrance of the stable, that they saw the new

star and the angels, and peered through the darkness, watching the Blesséd with her Baby in her arms.

Alfred Noyes, in one of the loveliest of his poems, gives the good green trees their part in the knowledge of the mystery of Christendom. He lets his fir tree chant

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,

because "love is all" the world over.

At the end of the collection are a number of poems which tell what sweet and good things should come out of Christmas. A fifteenth century carol emphasizes the idea that happiness is not something which happens to us or in us altogether without effort. Merriment, we are told, is a religious duty:—

A principal point of charity,
It is merry to be
In Him that is but One.
Be merry, be merry, I pray you, be merry every one.

Margaret Widdemer tells the other side of the same truth in her "Holly Carol" that describes the coming of the Christ Child to the sorrowful to show them

how the thorn-leaves
Have scarlet fruit beneath.

Here also is Robert's Herrick's Christmas carol in three parts with the echoing line

The Darling of the world is come.

I should have included another by Herrick but for an unkind suggestion in it about the Jews. I have excluded a very good modern poem for the same reason. Why should anybody insult Jesus by insulting His own people on His festal day? Any nation into which He had been born would have slain Him, for to give

great love to all is to win much hatred from many, and was He not the greatest of the prophets? I have often felt that many Jews would be Christians openly, as indeed they often are in inward fact before God, if it were not for the behavior of some of those who claim to be His followers. Certainly the world he lived and died and rose up to save will never be really Christian until all races and nations and kinds of souls meet in friendly fashion before bright altars and labor together for the healing of broken lives and the building of new beauty in human relationships.

At the very end of the book I have set G. K. Chesterton's most lovable poem "The House of Christmas" which closes with the lines:—

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.

* * * * * *

I turned away from the pages on which I set down these things and closed my eyes. Musingly I said to myself,

"I wonder where the house of Christmas is. . ."

And immediately it was as if someone answered,

"Up Christmas Hill."

Then, with my eyes still shut, I looked, and I saw the tallest hill that ever was climbed, with the whitest, softest, stillest snow on it that ever fell out of any skies. And giant Christmas trees

grew on it, and they were lighted with stars and decorated with suns and moons. And between two hedges of the shiniest holly I ever saw, with the plumpest and reddest of berries on it, there wound a road that was wide enough for the comfort of a man and a woman walking together as friends and yet so narrow that throngs of little children would be quite safe there. And I saw the road winding up, up, up the hill beyond all the difficulties and sorrows and trials that ever have been or ever could be. And I thought to myself that this was the Happy Way.

And I looked again and saw that for a little space at the foot of the hill it ran parallel to Pleasure Lane. But perhaps it knew that Pleasure Lane is not going anywhere at all. It is just a blind alley. Happy Way turns and runs straight up the hill.

I wondered if it was always empty. . .

Empty?

Suddenly, as if I had tuned in with a radio receiver, I heard a great multitude of talking and laughing and singing and shouting voices. And I looked more carefully than ever, and soon saw, between the hedges of glossy holly an innumerable throng of all of the kinds of people that live in the whole world, dark and fair people, strong and frail people, rich and poor people, young and old people, all moving on, on, on, up Christmas Hill. But in one thing they were all alike. They were all glad!

A great company of little children led the long procession of joyful pilgrims, because, as their eyes told me, they knew the way. Some of them were carrying the gayest toys that ever were made, and others wore wreaths of the sweetest flowers that ever grew. Still others were followed by their pets, little frisky dogs, fluffy kittens, bleating lambs, and bunnies with twitching ears and noses.

The children were followed by all who loved and understood and helped them, by mothers and fathers and teachers and friends with no children of their own. For they were the first to learn the way from the children.

Then came the mighty fellowship of the poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind, the cripples of the spirit who had cut off from their lives things dearer than the hand and foot that Jesus said might offend. And I told myself that they had come out of great tribulation; but surely they had found great joy.

Then I saw the strong ranks of those who have borne heavy burdens, chanting steadily and triumphantly as they went on. And they were followed by saints and martyrs with scars and many-colored, glorious haloes, and by all the high-souled lovers that kept love sweet for others here on earth, or renounced the love of earth for the love of Heaven. And then came all men and women who were good and staunch friends, whose words would go unchallenged through the ages. And I saw them all going on together, laughing and talking, singing and shouting, to the top of Christmas Hill.

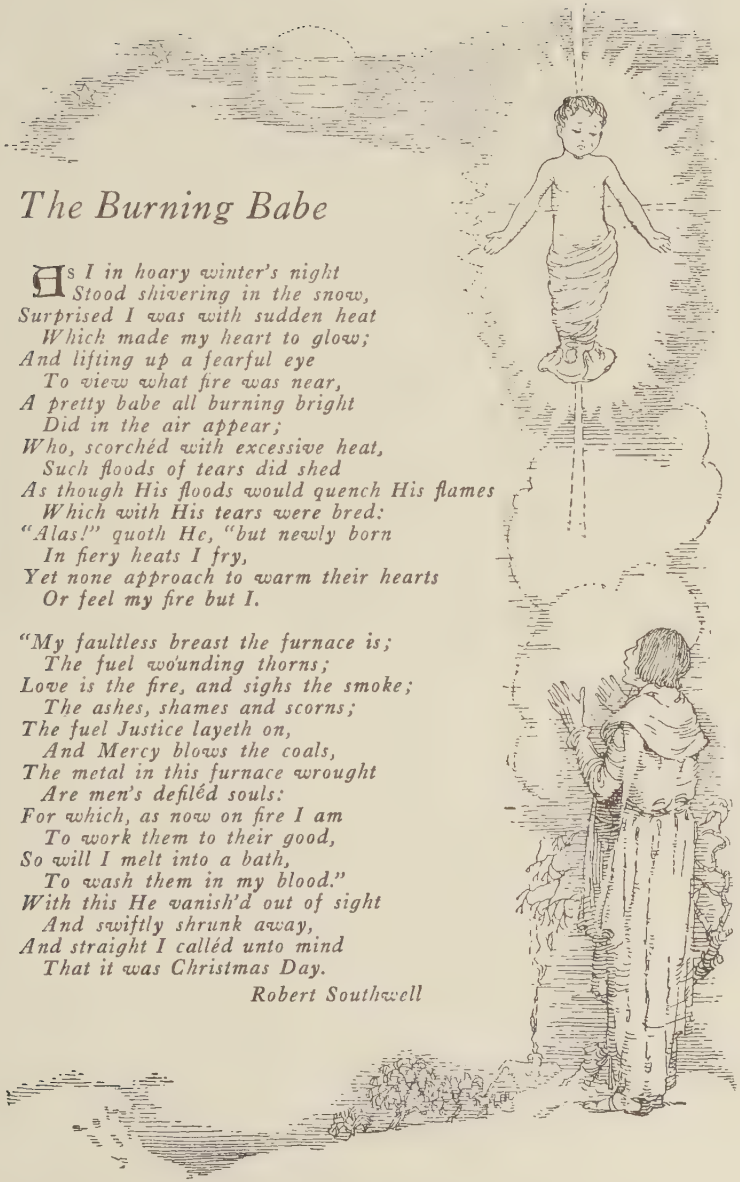
When they reached the top it was as if a great door opened in Heaven, that is the house of Christmas, and from within came a light that grew and strengthened until great streaming rays of rose and amber and emerald and amethyst flowed down over the snowy hill, down, down, down even to me. They had found the Yule Fire, I told myself quietly. It must be the Yule Fire.

The Burning Babe

As I in hoary winter's night
Stood shivering in the snow,
Surprised I was with sudden heat
Which made my heart to glow;
And lifting up a fearful eye
To view what fire was near,
A pretty babe all burning bright
Did in the air appear;
Who, scorchéd with excessive heat,
Such floods of tears did shed
As though His floods would quench His flames
Which with His tears were bred:
"Alas!" quoth He, "but newly born
In fiery heats I fry,
Yet none approach to warm their hearts
Or feel my fire but I.

"My faultless breast the furnace is;
The fuel wounding thorns;
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke;
The ashes, shames and scorns;
The fuel Justice layeth on,
And Mercy blows the coals,
The metal in this furnace wrought
Are men's defiléd souls:
For which, as now on fire I am
To work them to their good,
So will I melt into a bath,
To wash them in my blood."
With this He vanish'd out of sight
And swiftly shrunk away,
And straight I calléd unto mind
That it was Christmas Day.

Robert Southwell



O LITTLE town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night.

For Christ is born of Mary,
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
Oh come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel!

Phillips Brooks

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The Little Town

O LITTLE *town, O little town,*
Upon the hills so far,
We see you, like a thing sublime,
Across the great gray wastes of time,
And men go up and men go down,
But follow still the star!

And this is humble Bethlehem
In the Judean wild;
And this is lowly Bethlehem
Wherein a mother smiled;
Yea, this is happy Bethlehem
That knew the little Child!

Ay, this is glorious Bethlehem
Where He drew living breath
(Ah, precious, precious, Bethlehem!—
So every mortal saith)
Who brought to all that tread the earth
Life's triumph over death!

O little town, O little town,
Upon the hills afar,
You call to us, a thing sublime,
Across the great gray wastes of time,
For men go up and men go down,
But follow still the star!

Clinton Scollard

The Builder

SMOOTHING a cypress beam
With a scarred hand,
I saw a carpenter
In a far land.

Down past the flat roofs
Poured the white sun;
But still he bent his back,
The patient one.

And I paused surprised
In that queer place
To find an old man
With a haunting face.

"Who art thou, carpenter,
Of the bowed head;
And what buildest thou?"
"Heaven," he said.

Willard Wattles

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The Vigil of Joseph

AFTER the Wise Men went, and the strange star
Had faded out, Joseph the father sat
Watching the sleeping Mother and the Babe,
And thinking stern, sweet thoughts the long night through.

"Ah, what am I, that God has chosen me
To bear this blesséd burden, to endure
Daily the presence of this loveliness,
To guide this Glory that shall guide the world?

"Brawny these arms to win Him bread, and broad
This bosom to sustain Her. But my heart
Quivers in lonely pain before that Beauty
It loves—and serves—and cannot understand!"

Elsa Barker

Mary's Girlhood

THIS is the blesséd Mary, pre-elect
God's virgin. Gone is a great while, and she
Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee.
Unto God's will she brought devout respect,
Profound simplicity of intellect.
And supreme patience. From her mother's knee
Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;
Strong in grave peace; in pity circumspect.

So held she through her girlhood; as it were
An angel-watered lily, that near God
Grows and is quiet. Till, one day at home,
She woke in her white bed, and had no fear
At all,—yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed:
Because the fulness of the time was come.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Mary

FAIREST of women must have been that maid
To whom the great archangel Gabriel
Announced Messiah. Were there asphodel,
Rue, violet and rose within the glade
Of Mary's vision? *Do not be afraid,*
The Presence whispered, *King Emmanuel*
Cometh to earth! His voice was like a bell
Softened by distance, ere its clangour fade.

Tender is Gabriel—the lord of birth;
He comes to mothers with white folded wings,
And eyes like pansies misted by the dew:
The little cradle-song a woman sings,
Crooning above her babe, that angel knew
When all the morning stars hosannaed earth!

Robert Norwood

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Our Lady

MOTHER of God! no lady thou:
Common woman of common earth!
Our Lady ladies call thee now,
But Christ was never of gentle birth:
A common man of the common earth.

For God's ways are not as our ways.
The noblest lady in the land
Would have given up half her days,
Would have cut off her right hand,
To bear the Child that was God of the land.

Never a lady did He choose,
Only a maid of low degree,
So humble she might not refuse
The carpenter of Galilee.
A daughter of the people, she.

Out she sang the song of her heart,
Never a lady had so sung.
She knew no letters, had no art;
To all mankind, in woman's tongue,
Hath Israelitish Mary sung.

And still for men to come she sings,
Nor shall her singing pass away.
He hath filled the hungry with good things—
Oh, listen, lords and ladies gay—.
And the rich He hath sent empty away.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

A Hymn to the Virgin

Of on that is so fayr and bright
Velut maris stella,
Brighter than the day is light,
Parens et puella:
Ic crie to the, thou see to me,
Levedy, preye thi Sone for me,
Tam pia,
That ic mote come to thee
Maria.

Al this world was for-lore
Eva peccatrice,
Tyl our Lord was y-bore
De te genetrice.
With *ave* it went away
Thuster nyth and comz the day
Salutis;
The welle springeth ut of the,
Virtutis.

Levedy, flour of alle thing,
Rosa sine spina,
Thu bere Jhesu, hevene king,
Gratia divina:
Of alle thu ber'st the pris,
Levedy, quene of paradys
Electa:
Mayde milde, moder *es*
Effecta.

Anonymous

on] one. levedy] lady. thuster] dark. pris] prize

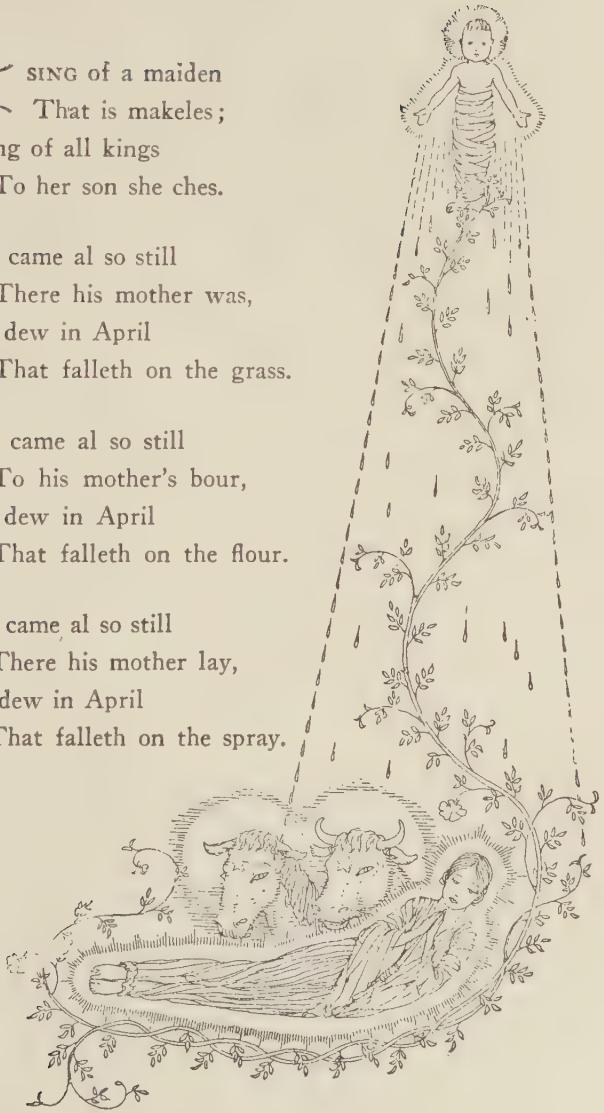
Carol

I SING of a maiden
That is makeles;
King of all kings
To her son she ches.

He came al so still
There his mother was,
As dew in April
That falleth on the grass.

He came al so still
To his mother's bour,
As dew in April
That falleth on the flour.

He came al so still
There his mother lay,
As dew in April
That falleth on the spray.



Mother and maiden
  Was never none but she;
Well may such a lady
  Goddes mother be.

Anonymous

makeles] matchless. ches] chose.

Mary Mother of Divine Grace, Compared to the Air We Breathe

WILD air, world-mothering air,
Nestling me everywhere,
That each eyelash or hair
Girdles; goes home betwixt
The fleeciest, frailest-fixed
Snow-flake; that's fairly mixed
With riddles, and is rife
In every least thing's life;
This needful, never spent
And nursing element;
My more than meat and drink,
My meal at every wink;
This air which by life's law
My lung must draw and draw
Now, but to breathe its praise,—
Minds me in many ways
Of her who not only
Gave God's infinity,
Dwindled to infancy,
Welcome in womb and breast,
Birth, milk, and all the rest,
But mothers each new grace
That does now reach our race,
Mary Immaculate,
Merely a woman, yet
Whose presence, power is
Great as no goddess's

Was deeméd, dreaméd; who
This one work has to do—
Let all God's glory through,
God's glory, which would go
Thro' her and from her flow
Off, and no way but so.

I say that we are wound
With mercy round and round
As if with air: the same
Is Mary, more by name,
She, wild web, wondrous robe,
Mantles the guilty globe.
Since God has let dispense
Her prayers His providence.
Nay, more than almoner,
The sweet alms' self is her
And men are meant to share
Her life as life does air.

If I have understood,
She holds high motherhood
Towards all our ghostly good,
And plays in grace her part
About man's beating heart,
Laying like air's fine flood
The death-dance in his blood;
Yet no part but what will
Be Christ our Saviour still.

Of her flesh he took flesh:
He does take, fresh and fresh,
Though much the mystery how,
Not flesh but spirit now,
And wakes, O marvelous!
New Nazareths in us,
Where she shall yet conceive
Him, morning, noon, and eve;
New Bethlehems, and be born
There, evening, noon and morn,
Bethelehem or Nazareth,
Men here may draw like breath
More Christ, and baffle death;
Who, born so, comes to be
New self, and nobler me
In each one, and each one
More makes, when all is done,
Both God's and Mary's son.
  Again, look overhead
How air is azurèd.
O how! Nay do but stand
Where you can lift your hand
Skywards: rich, rich it laps
Round the four finger-gaps.
Yet such a sapphire-shot
Charged, steepèd sky will not
Stain light. Yea, mark you this:

It does no prejudice.
The glass-blue days are those
When every colour glows,
Each shape and shadow shows.
Blue be it: this blue heaven
The seven or seven times seven
Hued sunbeam will transmit
Perfect, nor alter it.
Or if there does some soft
On things aloof, aloft,
Bloom breathe, that one breath more
Earth is the fairer for.
Whereas did air not make
This bath of blue and slake
This fire, the sun would shake
A blear and blinding ball
With blackness bound, and all
The thick stars round him roll.
Flashing like flecks of coal,
Quartz-fret, or sparks of salt
In grimy vasty vault.
So God was God of old;
A mother came to mould
Those limbs like ours which are,
What must make our daystar
Much dearer to mankind:
Whose glory bare would blind

Or less would win man's mind.
Through her we may see Him
Made sweeter, not made dim,
And her hand leaves His light
Sifted to suit our sight.

Be thou, then, O thou dear
Mother, my atmosphere;
My happier world wherein
To wend and meet no sin;
Above me, round me lie
Fronting my froward eye;
With sweet and scarless sky;
Stir in my ears, speak there
Of God's love, O live air,
Of patience, penance, prayer;
World-mothering air, air wild,
Wound with thee, in thee isled,
Fold home, fast fold thy child.

Gerard Hopkins

The Expectation

OVER the apple-trees with their red load
In world's-end orchards, over dark yew woods,
O'er fires of sunset glassed in wizard streams,
O'er mill and meadow of those farthest lands,
Over the reapers, over the sere sails
Of homing ships and every breaking wave,
Over the haven and the entrancëd town,
O'er hearths aflame with fir-trunks and fir-cones,
Over the children playing in the streets,
Over the harpers harping on the bridge,
O'er lovers in their dream and their desire,
There falls from the high heaven a subtle sense
Of presage and a deep, expectant hush,
And the wise watchers know the time draws on
And that amid the snows of that same year
The earth will bear her longed-for perfect Fruit.

Richard Lawson Gales

Advent Meditation

No sudden thing of glory and fear
Was the Lord's coming; but the dear
Slow nature's days followed each other
To form the Saviour from his mother—
One of the children of the year.

The earth, the rain, received the trust,—
The sun and dews, to frame the Just.
He drew his daily life from these
According to his own decrees,
Who makes man from the fertile dust.

Sweet summer and the winter wild,
These brought him forth, the Undefiled.
The happy springs renewed again
His daily bread, the growing grain,
The food and raiment of the child.

Alice Meynell

By special permission, Charles Scribner's Sons.

The Cherry-Tree Carol

As Joseph was a-walking,
He heard an angel sing,
"This night shall be the birth-time
Of Christ, the heavenly King.

"He neither shall be born
In housen nor in hall,
Nor in the place of paradise,
But in an ox's stall.

"He neither shall be clothèd
In purple nor in pall,
But in the fair white linen
That usen babies all.

"He neither shall be rockèd
In silver nor in gold,
But in a wooden manger
That resteth on the mould."

As Joseph was a-walking,
There did an angel sing,
And Mary's child at midnight
Was born to be our King.

Then be ye glad, good people,
This night of all the year,
And light ye up your candles,
For his star it shineth clear.

Old English

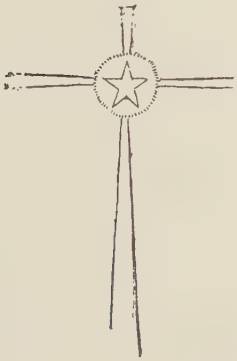
The Light of Bethlehem

'Tis Christmas Night! the snow,
A flock unnumbered lies:
The old Judean stars aglow,
Keep watch within the skies.

An icy stillness holds
The pulses of the night:
A deeper mystery infolds
The wondering Hosts of Light.

Till, lo, with reverence pale
That dims each diadem,
The lordliest, earthward bending, hail
The Light of Bethlehem!

John Bannister Tabb



A Christmas Eve Choral

HALLELUJA!
What sound is this across the dark
While all the earth is sleeping? Hark!
Halleluja! Halleluja! Halleluja!

Why are thy tender eyes so bright,
Mary, Mary?
On the prophetic deep of night
Joseph, Joseph,
I see the borders of the light,
And in the day that is to be
An aureoled man-child I see,
Great love's son, Joseph.

Halleluja!
He hears not, but she hears afar,
The Minstrel Angel of the star.
Halleluja! Halleluja! Halleluja!

Why is thy gentle smile so deep,
Mary, Mary?
It is the secret I must keep,
Joseph, Joseph,—
The joy that will not let me sleep,
The glory of the coming days,
When all the world shall turn to praise
God's goodness, Joseph.

Halleluja!
Clear as the bird that brings the morn
She hears the heavenly music borne.
Halleluja! Halleluja! Halleluja!

Why is thy radiant face so calm,
Mary, Mary?
His strength is like a royal palm,
Joseph, Joseph;
His beautiy like the victor's psalm,
He moves like morning o'er the lands,
And there is healing in his hands
For sorrow, Joseph.

Halleluja!
Tender as dew-fall on the earth
She hears the choral of love's birth.
Halleluja! Halleluja! Halleluja!

What is the message come to thee,
Mary, Mary?
I hear like wind within the tree,
Joseph, Joseph,
Or like a far-off melody
His deathless voice proclaiming peace,
And bidding ruthless wrong to cease,
For love's sake, Joseph.

Halleluja!
Moving as rain-wind in the spring
She hears the angel-chorus ring.
Halleluja! Halleluja! Halleluja!

Why are thy patient hands so still,
Mary, Mary?
I see the shadow on the hill,
Joseph, Joseph,
And wonder if it is God's will
That courage, service, and glad youth
Shall perish in the cause of truth
Forever, Joseph.

Halleluja!
Her heart in that celestial chime
Has heard the harmony of time.
Halleluja! Halleluja! Halleluja!

Why is thy voice so strange and far,
Mary, Mary?
I see the glory of the star,
Joseph, Joseph,
And in its light all things that are
Made glad and wise beyond the sway
Of death and darkness and dismay,
In God's time, Joseph.

Halleluja!
To every heart in love 'tis given
To hear the ecstasy of heaven.
Halleluja! Halleluja! Halleluja!

Bliss Carman

The Birth

THERE is a legend that the love of God
So quickened under Mary's heart it wrought
Her very maidenhood to holier stuff. . . .
However that may be, the birth befell
Upon a night when all the Syrian stars
Swayed tremulous before one lordlier orb
That rose in gradual splendor,
Paused,
Flooding the firmament with mystic light,
And dropped upon the breathing hills
A sudden music
Like a distillation from its gleams;
A rain of spirit and a dew of song!

Don Marquis

Before the Paling of the Stars

BEFORE the paling of the stars,
Before the winter morn,
Before the earliest cockcrow,
Jesus Christ was born:
Born in a stable,
Cradled in a manger,
In the world His hands had made
Born a stranger.

Priest and King lay fast asleep
In Jerusalem,
Young and old lay fast asleep
In crowded Bethlehem:
Saint and Angel, ox and ass,
Kept a watch together
Before the Christmas daybreak
In the winter weather.

Jesus on His Mother's breast
In the stable cold,
Spotless Lamb of God was He,
Shepherd of the fold:
Let us kneel with Mary Maid,
With Joseph bent and hoary,
With Saint and Angel, ox and ass,
To hail the King of Glory.

Christina Rossetti

A Christmas Folk-Song

The Little Jesus came to town;
The wind blew up, the wind blew down;
Out in the street the wind was bold;
Now who would house Him from the cold?

Then opened wide a stable door,
Fair were the rushes on the floor;
The Ox put forth a hornèd head;
"Come, little Lord, here make Thy bed."

Uprose the Sheep were folded near;
"Thou Lamb of God, come, enter here."
He entered there to rush and reed,
Who was the Lamb of God indeed.

The little Jesus came to town;
With ox and sheep He laid Him down;
Peace to the byre, peace to the fold,
For that they housed Him from the cold!

Lizette Woodworth Reese

THE Ox he openeth wide the Doore,
And from the Snowe he calls her inne,
And he hath seen her Smile therefor,
Our Ladye without Sinne.
Now soone from Sleep
A Starre shall leap,
And soone arrive both King and Hinde:
Amen, Amen:
But O, the Place co'd I but finde!

The Ox hath hush'd his voyce and bent
Trewe eyes of Pitty ore the Mow,
And on his lovelie Neck, forspent,
The Blessed layes her Browe.
Around her feet
Full Warme and Sweete
His bowerie Breath doth meeklie dwell:
Amen, Amen:
But sore am I with Vaine Travel!

The Ox is host in Judah stall
And Host of more than onelie one,
For close she gathereth withal
Our Lorde her littel Sonne.
Glad Hinde and King
Their Gyfte may bring,
But wo'd to-night my Teares were there,
Amen, Amen:
Between her Bosom and His hayre!

Louise Imogen Guiney

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A Christmas Song

THEN from His throne the Godhead bowed
To human form below,
The Heavens dropt down, and every cloud
Hung loath to let Him go.
Oh, bright the light, and white the night,
When, full of favour stored,
God's maid lay down in Bethlehem town,
To wait the coming Lord!

Before His Feet went down the snow
Amid the tranquil night,
Till all the world lay white below
To greet the Lord of Light.
Oh, bright the light, and white the night,
When, full of favour stored,
God's Maid lay down in Bethlehem town,
To wait the coming Lord!

The rugged hills and all the rocks
Were covered as with fleece;
The towns were seen like folded flocks
To wait the Prince of Peace.
Oh, bright the light, and white the night,
When, full of favour stored,
God's Maid lay down in Bethlehem town,
To wait the coming Lord!

Oh, like a flock in field and fold,
The wintry world lay then,
On that fair night in days of old
When Christ came down to men.
Oh, bright the light, and white the night,
When, full of favour stored,
God's Maid lay down in Bethlehem town,
To wait the coming Lord!

Laurence Housman

While Shepherds Watched

WHILE shepherds watch'd their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The Angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.

"Fear not," said he (for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind);
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.

"To you in David's town this day
Is born of David's line
The Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;
And this shall be the sign:

"The heavenly Babe you there shall find
To human view display'd,
All meanly wrapt in swathing-bands,
And in a manger laid."

Thus spake the seraph; and forthwith
Appear'd a shining throng
Of angels praising God, and thus
Address'd their joyful song:

"All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace;
Good-will henceforth from heaven to men
Begin, and never cease!"

Nahum Tate

The Angels

RUN, shepherds, run where Bethlehem blest appears,
We bring the best of news; be not dismayed;
A Saviour there is born more old than years,
Amidst heaven's rolling height this earth who stayed.
In a poor cottage inned, a virgin maid
A weakling did Him bear, who all upbears;
There is He poorly swaddled, in manger laid,
To whom too narrow swaddlings are our spheres;
Run, shepherds, run and solemnise his birth.
This is that night—no, day grown great with bliss,
In which the power of Satan broken is:
In heaven be glory, peace unto the earth!
Thus singing, through the air the angels swam,
And cope of stars reëchoéd the same.

William Drummond
of Hawthornden

The Shepherds

SWEET, harmless livers! on whose holy leisure
Waits innocence and pleasure;
Whose leaders to those pastures and clear springs
Were patriarchs, saints and kings;
How happened it that in the dead of night
You only saw true light,
While Palestine was fast asleep and lay
Without one thought of day?
Was it because those first and blessed swains
Were pilgrims on those plains
When they received the promise, for which now
'Twas then first shown to you?

'Tis true He loves that dust whereon they go
That serve Him here below,
And therefore might for memory of those
His love there first disclose;
But wretched Salem, once His love, must now
No voice nor vision know;
Here stately piles with all their height and pride
Now languished and died,
And Bethlehem's humble cots above them stept
While all her seers slept;
Her cedar, fir, hewed stones, and gold were all
Polluted through their fall;
And those once sacred mansions were now
Mere emptiness and show.

This made the angel call at reeds and thatch,
  Yet where the shepherds watch,
And God's own lodging, though He could not lack,
  To be a common rack.
No costly pride, no soft-clothed luxury
  In those thin cells could lie;
Each stirring wind and storm blew through their cots,
  Which never harboured plots;
Only content and love and humble joys
  Lived there without all noise;
Perhaps some harmless cares for the next day
  Did in their bosoms play,
As where to lead their ship,[1] what silent nook,
  What springs or shades to look;
But that was all; and now with gladsome care
  They for the town prepare;
They leave their flock, and in a busy talk
  All towards Bethlem walk,
To seek their soul's great Shepherd who was come
  To bring all stragglers home;
Where now they find Him out, and, taught before,
  That Lamb of God adore,
That Lamb, whose days great kings and prophets wished
  And longed to see, but missed.
The first light they beheld was bright and gay,
  And turned their night to day;
But to this later light they saw in Him
  This day was dark and dim.

Henry Vaughan

[1] Sheep.

The Lame Shepherd

SLOWLY I followed on,
Stumbling and falling.
All the air sparkled;
All the air sung.
Even to my dull heart
Glory was calling;
Slowly I followed on,
Stumbling and falling.

Great wings arched over me,
Purple and amber;
Night was all color,
Night was all gleam.
Wearily up the hill
Needs must I clamber,
Though wings arched over me,
Purple and amber.

Proudly the chorus pealed
While I was panting.
Winds were all music,
Voices all praise;
Brooks, birds, the waving trees
Joined in the chanting;
Proudly the chorus pealed,
While I was panting.

Late came my aching feet,
Late to the manger;
All slept in silence,
All dreamed in dusk
Under the same dear stars.
No star a stranger.
Late came my aching feet,
Late to the manger.

Kissing a baby's hand,
Painfully kneeling,
Sweet little drowsy hand,
Honey of heaven,
Swift through my twisted limbs
Glowed a glad healing,
Kissing a baby's hand,
Kissing and kneeling.

Katharine Lee Bates

The Song of the Shepherds

It was near the first cock-crowing,
And Orion's wheel was going,
When an angel stood before us and our hearts were sore afraid.
Lo, his face was like the lightning,
When the walls of heaven are whitening,
And he brought us wondrous tidings of a joy that shall not fade.

Then a Splendor shone around us,
In the still field where he found us,
A-watch upon the Shepherd Tower and waiting for the light;
There where David as a stripling,
Saw the ewes and lambs go rippling
Down the little hills and hollows at the falling of the night.

Oh, what tender, sudden faces
Filled the old familiar places,
The barley-fields where Ruth of old went gleaning with the birds!
Down the skies the host came swirling,
Like sea-waters white and whirling,
And our hearts were strangely shaken by the wonder of their words.

Haste, O people: all are bidden—
Haste from places, high or hidden:
In Mary's Child the Kingdom comes, the heaven in beauty bends!
He has made all life completer:
He has made the Plain Way sweeter,
For the stall is His first shelter and the cattle His first friends.

He has come! the skies are telling:
He has quit the glorious dwelling;
And first the tidings came to us, the humble shepherd folk.
He has come to field and manger,
And no more is God a Stranger:
He comes as Common Man at home with cart and crookèd yoke.

As the shadow of a cedar
To a traveler in Gray Kedar
Will be the kingdom of His love, the k without end.
Tongues and Ages may disclaim Him,
Yet the Heaven of heavens will name Him
Lord of peoples, Light of nations, elder Brother, tender Friend.

Edwin Markham

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1595.

BEHOLD a silly tender Babe,
In freezing winter night,
In homely manger trembling lies;
Alas, a piteous sight.

The inns are full, no man will yield
This little pilgrim bed;
But forced He is with silly beasts
In crib to shroud His head.

Despise Him not for lying there,
First what He is inquire;
An orient pearl is often found
In depth of dirty mire.

Weigh not His crib, His wooden dish,
Nor beasts that by Him feed;
Weigh not His mother's poor attire,
Nor Joseph's simple weed.

This stable is a Prince's court,
This crib His chair of state;
The beasts are parcel of His pomp,
The wooden dish His plate.

The persons in that poor attire
  His royal liveries wear;
The Prince Himself is come from heaven,
  This pomp is praisëd there,

With joy approach, O Christian wight!
  Do homage to thy King;
And highly praise this humble pomp
  Which He from heaven doth bring.

Robert Southwell

Christmas Day

As on the night before this happy morn,
A blessed angel unto shepherds told,
Where (in a stable) He was poorly born,
Whom nor the earth nor heaven of heavens can hold:
Through Bethlehem rung
This news at their return:
Yea, angels sung
That God with us was born;
And they made mirth because we should not mourn.
This angel-carol sing we, then,
To God on high all glory be,
For peace on earth bestoweth He,
And showeth favour unto men.

This favour Christ vouchsafed for our sake;
To buy us thrones, He in a manger lay,
Our weakness took, that we His strength might take;
And was disrobed that He might us array;
Our flesh He wore,
Our sin to wear away;
Our curse He bore,
That we escape it may;
And wept for us that we might sing for aye.
With angels, therefore, sing again,
To God on high all glory be;
For peace on earth bestoweth He,
And showeth favour unto men.

George Wither

Out of Your Sleep Arise and Wake

About 1450.

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell.

OUT of your sleep arise and wake,
For God mankind now hath ytake,
All of a maid without any make[2];
Of all women she beareth the bell.
Nowell.

And through a maiden fair and wise
Now man is made of full great price;
Now angels kneelen to man's service;
And at this time all this befell.
Nowell.

Now man is brighter than the sun;
Now man in heaven on high shall wone;[3]
Blessed be God, this game is begun,
And His mother empress of hell.
Nowell.

That ever was thrall, now is he free;
That ever was small, now great is she;
Now shall God deem both thee and me
Unto His bliss, if we do well.
Nowell.

Now man may to heaven wend;
Now heaven and earth to him they bend;
He that was foe now is our friend.
This is no nay that I you tell.
Nowell.

Now blessed Brother, grant us grace,
At Doomësday to see Thy face,
And in Thy court to have a place,
That we may there sing *nowell.*
Nowell.

Anonymous

[1] *Text:* tho=then. [2] Mate. [3] Dwell.

The Golden Carol

(Of Melchior, Balthazar, and Gaspar, the Three Kings of Cologne)

We saw the light shine out a-far,
On Christmas in the morning,
And straight we knew Christ's Star it was,
Bright beaming in the morning.
Then did we fall on bended knee,
On Christmas in the morning,
And prais'd the Lord, who'd let us see
His glory at its dawning.

Oh! ever thought be of His Name,
On Christmas in the morning,
Who bore for us both grief and shame,
Afflictions sharpest scorning.
And may we die (when death shall come),
On Christmas in the morning,
And see in heav'n, our glorious home,
The Star of Christmas morning.

Old English

What Tidings?

Fifteenth Century.

"WHAT *tidings bringest thou, messenger,*
Of Christës birth this jolly day?"

A Babe is born of high nature,
The Prince of peace that ever shall be;
Of heaven and earth He hath the cure,[3]
His lordship is eternity.
Such wondrous tidings you may hear,
That man is made now Godës peer,
Whom sin had made but fiendës prey.

A wondrous thing doth now befall,
That King that formëd star and sun,
Heaven and earth and angels all,
Now in mankind is new begun,
Such wondrous tidings you may hear,
An infant of a single year,
That hath been ever and shall be aye.

That seemeth strange to us to see,
This bird[1] that hath this Babe yborn,
And Lord conceived of high degree
A maiden is and was beforn.
Such wondrous tidings you may hear,
That maiden and mother are one in fere,
And she a lady of great array.

That loveliest gan greet her Child:
"Hail, Son! Hail, Brother! Hail, Father dear!"
"Hail, Daughter!" He saith: "Hail, Sister. Hail,
Mother mild!"
This hailing was on quaint manner.
Such wondrous tidings you may hear,
That hailing was of so good cheer,
That man his pain is turned to play.

Anonymous

[1] Placed. [2] Guide. [3] Charge.

This Day

About 1450.

An heavenly song, I dare well say,
Is sung on earth to man this day.

This is the song that ye shall hear,
God is come from His empire,
And is made man with high desire,
This day.

He took our kind all of a maid,
By ox and ass He was ylaid.
Now is fulfilled that Scripture said,
This day.

Ay I wonder this in my mind,
That He that all may loose and bind,
Would be laid by beasts unkind,
This day.

He is a lord and by nature
A maiden's breast He sucked full pure.
Heaven and earth be in His cure,
This day.

Anonymous

Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity

THIS is the month, and this the happy morn
Wherein the Son of Heaven's Eternal King
Of wedded maid and virgin mother born,
Our great redemption from above did bring;
For so the holy sages once did sing
That He our deadly forfeit should release,
And with His Father work us a perpetual peace.

That glorious Form, that Light unsufferable,
And that far-beaming blaze of Majesty
Wherewith He wont at Heaven's high council-table
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,
He laid aside; and, here with us to be,
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.

Say, heavenly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
Afford a present to the Infant God?
Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain
To welcome Him to this His new abode,
Now while the heaven, by the sun's team untrod,
Hath took no print of the approaching light,
And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright?

See how from far, upon the eastern road,
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet:
O run, prevent them with thy humble ode
And lay it lowly at His Blesséd feet;
Have thou the honour first thy Lord to greet,
And join thy voice unto the Angel quire
From out His secret altar touch'd with hallow'd fire

The Hymn

It was the winter wild
While the heaven-born Child
All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies;
Nature in awe to Him
Had doff'd her gaudy trim,
With her great Master so to sympathize:
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the sun, her lusty paramour.

Only with speeches fair
She woos the gentle air
To hide her guilty front with innocent snow;
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame,
The saintly veil of maiden white to throw;
Confounded, that her Maker's eyes
Should look so near upon her foul deformities

But He, her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-eyed Peace;
She, crown'd with olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphere,
His ready harbinger,
With turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing;
And waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal peace through sea and land

No war, or battle's sound
Was heard the world around:
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hookéd chariot stood
Unstain'd with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the arméd throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began:
The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the water kist
Whispering new joys to the mild oceán—
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charméd wave.

The stars, with deep amaze,
Stand fix'd in steadfast gaze,
Bending one way their precious influence;
And will not take their flight
For all the morning light,
Or Lucifer that often warn'd them thence;
But in their glimmering orbs did glow
Until their Lord Himself bespake, and bid them go.

And though the shady gloom
Had given day her room,
The sun himself withheld his wonted speed,
And hid his head for shame,
As his inferior flame
The new-enlighten'd world no more should need;
He saw a greater Sun appear
Than his bright throne, or burning axletree could bear.

The shepherds on the lawn
Or ere the point of dawn
Sate simply chatting in a rustic row;
Full little thought they than
That the mighty Pan
Was kindly come to live with them below;
Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep:—

When such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet
As never was by mortal finger strook—
Divinely-warbled voice
Answering the stringéd noise,
As all their souls in blissful rapture took:
The air, such pleasure loth to lose,
With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly close.

Nature, that heard such sound
Beneath the hollow round
Of Cynthia's seat the airy region thrilling.
Now was almost won
To think her part was done,
And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;
She knew such harmony alone
Could hold all Heaven and Earth in happier union.

At last surrounds their sight
A globe of circular light
That with long beams the shamefaced night array'd;
The helméd Cherubim
And sworded Seraphim
Are seen in glittering ranks with wings display'd,
Harping in loud and solemn quire
With unexpressive notes, to Heaven's new-born Heir.

Such music (as 'tis said)
Before was never made
But when of old the Sons of Morning sung,
While the Creator great
His constellations set
And the well-balanced world on hinges hung;
And cast the dark foundations deep,
And bid the weltering waves their oozy channel keep.

Ring out, ye crystal spheres!
Once bless our human ears,
If ye have power to touch our senses so;
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time;
And let the bass of heaven's deep organ blow;
And with your ninefold harmony
Make up full consort to the angelic symphony.

For if such holy song
Enwrap our fancy long,
Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold;
And speckled Vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous Sin will melt from earthly mould;
And Hell itself will pass away,
And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

Yea, Truth and Justice then
Will down return to men,
Orb'd in a rainbow; and, like glories wearing,
Mercy will sit between
Throned in celestial sheen,
With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering;
And Heaven, as at some festival,
Will open wide the gates of her high palace-hall.

But wisest Fate says No;
This must not yet be so;
The Babe yet lies in smiling infancy
That on the bitter cross
Must redeem our loss;
So both Himself and us to glorify:
Yet first, to those ychain'd in sleep
The wakeful trump of doom must thunder through the deep;

With such a horrid clang
As on Mount Sinai rang
While the red fire and smouldering clouds outbrake:
The aged Earth aghast
With terror of that blast
Shall from the surface to the centre shake,
When, at the world's last session,
The dreadful Judge in middle air shall spread His throne.

And then at last our bliss
Full and perfect is,
But now begins; for from this happy day
The old Dragon under ground,
In straiter limits bound,
Not half so far casts his usurpéd sway;
And, wroth to see his kingdom fail,
Swinges the scaly horror of his folded tail.

The Oracles are dumb;
No voice or hideous hum
Runs through the archéd roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine,
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving:
No nightly trance or breathéd spell
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.

The lonely mountains o'er
And the resounding shore
A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament;
From haunted spring and dale
Edged with poplar pale
The parting Genius is with sighing sent;
With flower-inwoven tresses torn
The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

In consecrated earth
And on the holy hearth
The Lars and Lemurés moan with midnight plaint;
In urns, and altars round
A drear and dying sound
Affrights the Flamens at their service quaint;
And the chill marble seems to sweat,
While each peculiar Power foregoes his wonted seat.

Peor and Baalim
Forsake their temples dim,
With that twice-batter'd god of Palestine;
And moonéd Ashtaroth
Heaven's queen and mother both,
Now sits not girt with tapers' holy shine;
The Lybic Hammon shrinks his horn:
In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammuz mourn.

And sullen Moloch, fled,
Hath left in shadows dread
His burning idol all of blackest hue;
In vain with cymbals' ring
They call the grisly king,
In dismal dance about the furnace blue;
The brutish gods of Nile as fast,
Isis, and Orus, and the dog Anubis, haste

Nor is Osiris seen
In Memphian grove, or green,
Trampling the unshower'd grass with lowings loud:
Nor can he be at rest
Within his sacred chest;
Nought but profoundest Hell can be his shroud;
In vain with timbrell'd anthems dark
The sable-stoléd sorcerers bear his worshipt ark.

He feels from Juda's land
The dreaded Infant's hand;
The rays of Bethlehem blind his dusky eyn;
Nor all the gods beside
Longer dare abide,
Not Typhon huge ending in snaky twine:
Our Babe, to show His Godhead true,
Can in His swaddling bands control the damnéd crew.

So, when the sun in bed
Curtain'd with cloudy red
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale
Troop to the infernal jail,
Each fetter'd ghost slips to his several grave;
And the yellow-skirted fays
Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze.

But see! the Virgin blest
Hath laid her Babe to rest;
Time is, our tedious song should here have ending:
Heaven's youngest-teemèd star
Hath fix'd her polish'd car,
Her sleeping Lord with hand-maid lamp attending:
And all about the courtly stable
Bright-harness'd Angels sit in order serviceable.

John Milton

Christmas Hymn

HARK! how all the welkin rings
Glory to the King of kings!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
Universal nature say,
Christ the Lord is born to-day!

Christ, by highest Heaven adored;
Christ, the Everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of a Virgin's womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail, th' Incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to appear,
Jesus, our Immanuel here!

Hail! the heavenly Prince of Peace!
Hail! the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.

Come, Desire of nations, come,
Fix in us Thy humble home!
Rise, the Woman's conquering Seed,
Bruise in us the Serpent's head!
Now display Thy saving power,
Ruined nature now restore,
Now in mystic union join
Thine to ours, and ours to Thine!

Adam's likeness, Lord, efface;
Stamp Thy image in its place;
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in Thy love!
Let us Thee, though lost, regain,
Thee, the Life, the Heavenly Man:
O! to all Thyself impart,
Formed in each believing heart!

Charles Wesley

A Christmas Carol

In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty
Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

Angels and archangels
  May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
  Thronged the air;
But only His mother
  In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the Belovéd
  With a kiss.

What can I give Him,
  Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
  I would bring a lamb,
If I were a Wise Man
  I would do my part,—
Yet what I can I give Him,
  Give my heart.

Christina Rossetti

Christmas Epithalamium

Now comes the ordered prime;
A maiden in her time
Has given birth,
Unto the holy babe
Within the oxen cave
To end the mercy-dearth.

The long pavilioned wings
Of heaven-burnished things
Have domed the town;
Beneath them and the star,
Where babe and mother are
The kings kneel down.

False Herod's heart of stone
Is heavy for his throne,
Undebonaire;
This is the child foretold
By seers and prophets old
To sit in David's Chair.

But on the lighted rocks,
Among the startled flocks,
The poor lambs bound,
Thinking it sweet to hear
By night and starlight clear
The shrill pipes sound.

And all the bend of Earth,
Assured by heavenly mirth,
  Grows calm,
    And to her Maker's ear
    Antiphonal and clear
  Returns the psalm.

II

Yet in the mind of God
There was a marriage odd
  Of Death and Life;
    That very night did see
    The planting of a tree
  To make them man-and-wife.

High on a mount it grew
As sturdy as a yew,
  The Holy Rood,
    The Christmas tree to be
    Planted at Calvary
  By soldiers rude.

Thus God could in a breath
A marriage make for Death
  With Life,
    That in the babe and tree
    All faithful folk might see
  The end of that long strife.

So let the earth resound
As to a marriage sound
  Of minstrelsy,
    While Mary on her bed
    Lays the devoted head
  That holds all mystery.

Hervey Allen

Sonnet on the Nativity

IMMENSITY, cloister'd in thy dear womb,
Now leaves his well-beloved imprisonment;
There He hath made Himself to his intent,
Weak enough now into our world to come:
But oh! for thee, for Him, hath th'inn no room?
Yet lay Him in His stall, and from the'orient
Stars and wise men will travel, to prevent
The' effect of Herod's jealous general doom.
See'st thou, my soul! with thy faith's eye, how He,
Which fills all place, yet none holds Him, doth lie!
Was not His pity towards thee wondrous high,
That would have need to be pitied by thee?
Kiss Him, and with Him into Egypt go,
With His kind mother who partakes thy woe.

John Donne

The Greatest Wonder

To spread the azure canopy of Heaven,
And spangle it all with sparks of burning gold;
To place this ponderous globe of Earth so even
That it should all, and nought should it uphold;
With motions strange to endue the planets seven,
And Jove to make so mild, and Mars so bold;
To temper what is moist, dry, hot, and cold,
Of all their jars that sweet accords are given;
Lord, to Thy wisdom's nought, nought to Thy might;
But that Thou shouldst, Thy glory laid aside,
Come basely in mortality to bide,
And die for those deserved an endless night;
A wonder is, so far above out wit,
That angels stand amazed to think on it.

William Drummond

That Holy Thing

THEY all were looking for a king
To slay their foes and lift them high;
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing
That made a woman cry.

O Son of Man, to right my lot
Naught but Thy presence can avail;
Yet on the road Thy wheels are not,
Nor on the sea Thy sail!

My how or when Thou wilt not heed,
But come down Thine own secret stair,
That Thou mayst answer all my need—
Yea, every bygone prayer.

George MacDonald

Christmas Eve

It was the death-time of the year—
Sing, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo!*
How chill, how keen the stars appear!
The frost is on each gray grass-spear,
And frozen white are river and mere.

All human folk are houséd warm—
Sing, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo!*
With light and fire 'gainst night and storm.
And little children, safe from harm,
Each in its tender mother's arm.

Like the swan's plume the snows are spread—
Sing, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo!*
With Christ's dear mother lacking bed.
All doors are shut against her need,
Except the humble cattle-shed.

Shake down the grass for her to lie—
Sing, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo!*
And bid the quiet beasts draw nigh.
All Heaven shall now abase its eye,
Nor view the Birth so Heavenly.

Alone upon that holy ground—
Sing, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo!*
The ass and oxen knelt in swound.
While Bedlam lay in slumber bound,
The ass, the ox, were worthy found.

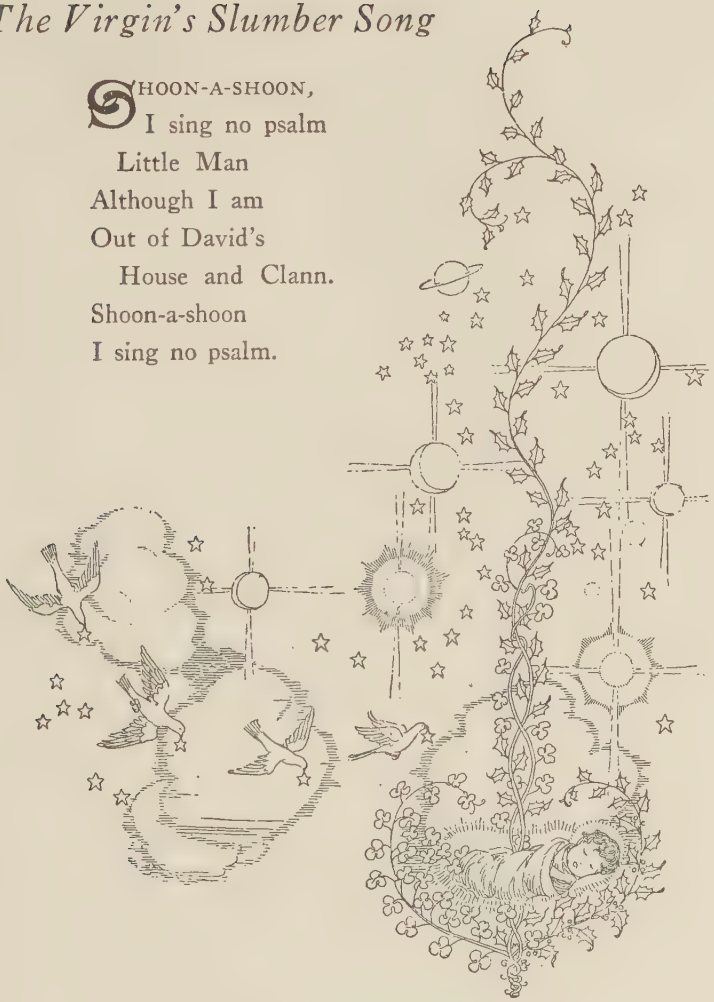
Before the Kings and Shepherds these—
Sing, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo!*
And Powers and Principalities.
With ass and oxen on their knees,
He doth exalt all lowliness.

Oh, dull and sin-clogged hearts of men—
Sing, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo!*
With frost upon the window pane.
God save ye, merry gentlemen:
For Christ, Our Lord, is born again.

Katharine Tynan

The Virgin's Slumber Song

SHOON-A-SHOON,
I sing no psalm
Little Man
Although I am
Out of David's
House and Clann.
Shoon-a-shoon
I sing no psalm.



(Hush-a-hoo,
  Blowing of pine;
Hush-a-hoo,
  Lowing of kine:
Hush-a-hoo,
  Though even in sleep,
His ear can hear
  The shamrocks creep.)

Moons and moons
And suns galore,
  Match their gold
On Slumber's shore,
With Your glittering
  Eyes that hold,
Moons and moons
And suns galore.

(Hush-a-hoo,
  Oceans of earth;
Hush-a-hoo,
  Motions of mirth:
Hush-a-hoo,
  Though over all,
His ear can hear
  The planets fall.)

O'er and o'er
And under all,
  Every star
Is now a ball,
For Your little
  Hands that are
O'er and o'er
And under all.

(Hush-a-hoo,
  Whirring of wings;
Hush-a-hoo,
  Stirring of strings:
Hush-a-hoo,
  Though in slumber deep,
His ear can hear
  My Song of Sleep.)

Francis Carlin

A Christmas Hymn

TELL me what is this innumerable throng
Singing in the heavens a loud angelic song?
These are they who come with swift and shining feet
From round about the throne of God the Lord of Light to greet.

O, who are these that hasten beneath the starry sky,
As if with joyful tidings that through the world shall fly?
The faithful shepherds these, who greatly were afeared
When, as they watched their flocks by night, the heavenly host appeared.

Who are these that follow across the hills of night
A star that westward hurries along the fields of light?
Three wise men from the east who myrrh and treasure bring
To lay them at the feet of him, their Lord and Christ and King.

What babe new-born is this that in a manger cries?
Near on her bed of pain his happy mother lies.
O, see! the air is shaken with white and heavenly wings—
This is the Lord of all the earth, this is the King of kings.

Tell me, how may I join in this holy feast
With all the kneeling world, and I of all the least?
Fear not, O faithful heart, but bring what most is meet;
Bring love alone, true love alone, and lay it at his feet.

Richard Watson Gilder

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Litany of the Dark People

OUR flesh that was a battle-ground
Shows now the morning-break;
The ancient deities are downed
For thy eternal sake.
Now that the past is left behind,
Fling wide Thy garment's hem,
That we stay one with Thee in mind,
O Christ of Bethlehem!

The thorny wreath may ridge our brow,
The spear may mar our side,
And on white wood from a scented bough
We may be crucified;
Yet no assault the old gods make
Upon our agony
Shall swerve our footsteps from the wake
Of Thine, toward Calvary.

And if we hunger now and thirst,
Grant our withholders may,
When heaven's constellations burst
Upon Thy crowning day,
Be fed by us—, and given to see
Thy mercy in our eyes,
When Bethlehem and Calvary
Are merged in Paradise.

Countée Cullen

Carol Naïve

WAS never none other
Like our God's Mother.

I sing the Lady of all most fair,
Of all most dainty and debonaire,
She to whose feet the angels come,—
Lady Mary of God's Kingdom!

I sing the Lady of all most good,
Immaculate Lady of Motherhood,
She that holdeth our hearts in fee,—
Lady Mary of God's City.

I sing the Lady of all most dear,
She that cherished us yesteryear,
She that will cherish when this world dies,—
Lady Mary of Paradise!

Yet was never none so fair,
Yet was never none so good,
On the green earth anywhere
As our Lady of Motherhood.—

Yet never none other
Like our God's Mother.

John McClure

Vines branching stilly
Shade the open door,
In the house of Zion's Lily,
Cleanly and poor.
Oh, brighter than wild laurel
The Babe bounds in her hand,
The King, who for apparel
Hath but a swaddling-band,
And sees her heavenlier smiling than stars in
His command!

Soon, mystic changes
Part Him from her breast,
Yet there awhile He ranges
Gardens of rest:
Yea, she the first to ponder
Our ransom and recall,
Awhile may rock Him under
Her young curls' fall,
Against that only sinless love-loyal heart of all.

What shall inure Him
Unto the deadly dream,
When the Tetrarch shall abjure Him,
The thief blaspheme,
And scribe and soldier jostle

About the shameful tree,
And even an Apostle
Demand to touch and see?—
But she hath kissed her Flower where the
Wounds are to be.

Louise Imogen Guiney

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G. M. RICHARDS

Good King Wenceslas

Good King Wenceslas looked out,
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay around about,
Deep, and crisp, and even.

Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gath'ring winter fuel.

"Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"

"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain;
Right against the forest fence,
By St. Agnes' fountain."

"Bring me flesh, and bring me wine,
Bring me pine logs hither:
Thou and I will see him dine,
When we bear them thither."

Page and monarch forth they went,
Forth they went together;
Through the rude wind's wild lament,
And the bitter weather.

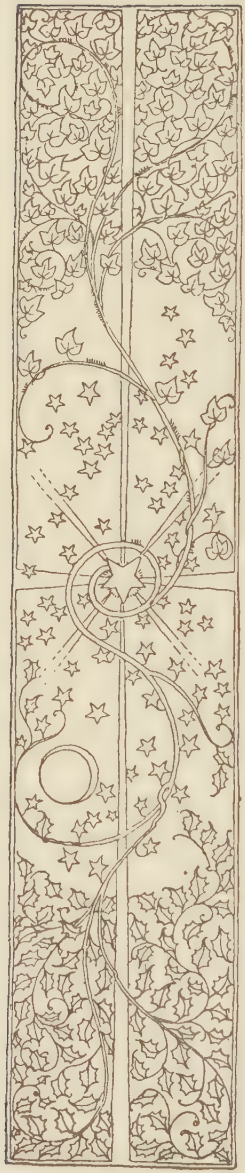
"Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer."

"Mark my footsteps, good my page!
Tread thou in them boldly;
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the saint had printed.

Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.

John Mason Neale



How Far Is It To Bethlehem

How far is it to Bethlehem?
Not very far.
Shall we find the stable-room
Lit by a star?

Can we see the little Child,
Is He within?
If we lift the wooden latch
May we go in?

May we stroke the creatures there,
Ox, ass, or sheep?
May we peep like them and see
Jesus asleep?

If we touch His tiny hand
Will he awake?
Will He know we've come so far
Just for his sake?

Great Kings have precious gifts,
And we have naught;
Little smiles and little tears
Are all we brought.

For all weary children
Mary must weep.
Here, on His bed of straw,
Sleep, children, sleep.

God, in His Mother's arms
  Babes in the byre,
Sleep, as they sleep who find
  Their heart's desire.

Frances Chesterton

"—To All People"

So long ago, and not forgotten yet!
Shall we remember other things as well
As that faint whispered foreign syllable
Of rapture which the winds of heaven met
And bore like light from a sun quick to set
To every lonely peak and crowded fell,
That golden whisper of a miracle
Men dare to know and do not dare forget?

Shall all the sounding tempests of red war,
The clangor of stern empire, the soft notes
Of lovers, or the poet's lonely horn,
Ring with a noise perpetual and far
As that soft whisper out of heaven's throats
That said, "Lo, unto you the Christ is born"?

Clement Wood

Christmas

All after pleasures as I rid one day,
My horse and I both tired, body and mind,
With full cry of affections quite astray,
I took up in the next inn I could find.

There, when I came, Whom found I but my dear,
My dearest Lord; expecting till the grief
Of pleasures brought me to Him; ready there
To be of all passengers' most sweet relief?

O Thou, Whose glorious, yet contracted, light,
Wrapt in Night's mantle, stole into a manger;
Since my dark soul and brutish—is Thy right,
To Man, of all beasts, be not Thou a stranger.

Furnish and deck my soul, that Thou may'st have
A better lodging than a rack or grave.

The shepherds sing; and shall I silent be?
My God, no hymn for Thee?
My soul's a shepherd too: a flock it feeds
Of thoughts and words and deeds.
The pasture is Thy word, the streams Thy grace,
Enriching every place.

Shepherds and flock shall sing, and all my powers
Ousting the daylight hours.

Then we will chide the sun for letting night
Take up his place and right:
We sing one common Lord; wherefore he should
Himself the candle hold.

I will go searching till I find a sun
Shall stay till we have done;
A willing shiner, that shall shine as gladly
As frost-nipt suns look sadly.
Then we will sing and shine all our own day,
And one another pay.
His beams shall cheer my breast, and both so twine.
Till ev'n His beams sing and my music shine.

George Herbert

Prayer

LAST night I crept across the snow,
Where only tracking rabbits go,
And then I waited quite alone
Until the Christmas radiance shone!

At midnight twenty angels came,
Each white and shining like a flame.
At midnight twenty angels sang,
The stars swung out like bells and rang.

They lifted me across the hill,
They bore me in their arms until
A greater glory greeted them.
It was the town of Bethlehem.

And gently, then, they set me down,
All worshipping that holy town,
And gently, then, they bade me raise
My head to worship and to praise.

And gently, then, the Christ smiled down.
Ah, there was glory in that town!
It was as if the world were free
And glistening with purity.

And in that vault of crystal blue,
It was as if the world were new,
And myriad angels, file on file,
Gloried in the Christ-child's smile.

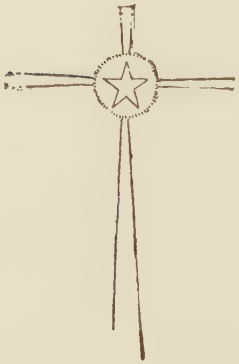
It was so beautiful to see
Such glory, for a child like me,
So beautiful, it does not seem
It could have been a Christmas dream.

John Farrar

Out of the Shadow

OUT of the Shadow of the Night
I come, led by the starshine bright,
With broken heart to bring to Thee
The fruit of Thine Epiphany,
The gift my fellows send by me,
The myrrh to bed Thine agony,
I set it here beneath Thy feet,
In token of Death's great defeat;
And hail Thee Conqueror in the strife,
And hail Thee Lord of Light and Life.
All hail! All hail the Virgin Son!
All hail! Thou little helpless One!
All hail! Thou King upon the Tree!
All hail! The Babe on Mary's Knee
The centre of all mystery!

Michael Fairless



A Ballad of Christmas

It was about the deep of night,
And still was earth and sky,
When 'neath the moonlight dazzling bright,
Three ghosts came riding by.

Beyond the sea, beyond the sea,
Lie kingdoms for them all:
I wot their steeds trod wearily—
The journey was not small.

By rock and desert, sand and stream,
They footsore late did go:
Now like a sweet and blessed dream
Their path was deep with snow.

Shining like hoar-frost, rode they on,
Three ghosts in earth's array:
It was about the hour when wan
Night turns at hint of day.

Oh, but their hearts with woe distraught
Hailed not the wane of night,
Only for Jesu still they sought
To wash them clean and white.

For bloody was each hand, and dark
With death each orbless eye;—
It was three traitors mute and stark
Came riding silent by.

Silver their raiment and their spurs,
And silver-shod their feet,
And silver-pale each face that stares
Into the moonlight sweet.

And he upon the left that rose
Was Pilate, Prince of Rome,
Whose journey once lay far abroad
And now was nearing home.

And he upon the right that rode
Herod of Salem sate,
Whose mantle dipped in children's blood
Shone clear as Heaven's gate.

And he these twain betwixt that rode
Was clad as white as wool,
Dyed in the Mercy of his God
White was he crown to sole.

Throned mid a myriad saints in bliss
  Rise shall the Babe of Heaven
To shine on these three ghosts, I wis,
  Smit thro' with sorrows seven.

Babe of the Blesséd Trinity
  Shall smile their steeds to see:
Herod and Pilate riding by,
  And Judas one of three.

Walter de la Mare

Hora Christi

SWEET is the time for joyous folk
Of gifts and minstrelsy;
Yet I, O lowly-hearted One,
Crave but Thy company.
On lonesome road, beset with dread,
My questing lies afar.
I have no light, save in the east
The gleaming of Thy star.

In cloistered aisles they keep to-day
Thy feast, O living Lord!
With pomp of banner, pride of song,
And stately sounding word.
Mute stand the kings of power and place,
While priests of holy mind
Dispense Thy blessed heritage
Of peace to all mankind.

I know a spot where budless twigs
Are bare above the snow,
And where sweet winter-loving birds
Flit softly to and fro;
There with the sun for altar-fire,
The earth for kneeling-place,
The gentle air for chorister,
Will I adore Thy face.

Loud, underneath the great blue sky,
My heart shall paean sing,
The gold and myrrh of meekest love
Mine only offering.
Bliss of Thy birth shall quicken me;
And for Thy pain and dole
Tears are but vain, so I will keep
The silence of the soul.

Alice Brown

Bethlehem

WHERE man was all too marred with sin,
The ass, the ox were bidden in.

Where angels were unmeet to come,
The humble entered Holydom.

Their innocent eyes, and full of awe,
Saw the fulfillment of the Law.

There, in the stable with the beast,
The Christmas Child hath spread His feast.

These gave their bed and eke their board
To be a cradle for their Lord.

Their honey breath, their tears all mild,
Warmed in the cold the new-born Child.

These His adorers were before
The Kings and Shepherds thronged the door.

And where no angels knelt there kneeled
The innocent creatures of the field.

O simple ones, much honoréd;
He who oppresses you indeed,

Opresses His kind hosts that lay
Once in the stable on the hay.

Katharine Tynan

Attendants

The mild-eyed Oxen and the gentle Ass,
By manger or in pastures that they graze,
Lift their slow heads to watch us where we pass,
A reminiscent wonder in their gaze.
Their low humility is like a crown,
A grave distinction they have come to wear,—
Their look gone past us—to a little Town,
And a white miracle that happened there.

An old, old vision haunts those quiet eyes,
Where proud remembrance drifts to them again,
Of Something that has made them humbly wise,
—These burden-bearers for the race of men—
And lightens every load they lift or pull,
Something that chanced because the Inn was full.

David Morton

The Oxen

CHRISTMAS Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come, see the oxen kneel

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Thomas Hardy

The Carol of the Fir Tree

QUOTH the Fir-tree, 'Orange and vine'
Sing Nowell, Nowell, Nowell!
'Have their honour: I have mine!'
In Excelsis Gloria!
'I am kin to the great king's house,'
Ring Nowell, Nowell, Nowell!
'And Lebanon whispers in my boughs.'
In Excelsis Gloria!

Apple and cherry, pear and plum,
Winds of Autumn, sigh Nowell!
All the trees like mages come
Bending low with 'Gloria!'
Holding out on every hand
Summer pilgrims to Nowell!
Gorgeous gifts from Elfin-land.
And the May saith 'Gloria!'

Out of the darkness—who shall say
Gold and myrrh for this Nowell:
How they win their wizard way?
Out of the East with 'Gloria'!
Men that eat of the sun and dew
Angels laugh and sing, 'Nowell.'
Call it 'fruit,' and say it 'grew'!
Into the West with 'Gloria'!

'Leaves that fall,' whispered the fir
Through the forest sing Nowell!
'I am winter's minister,'
In Excelsis Gloria!
Summer friends may come and go,
Up the mountain sing 'Nowell.'
Love abides thro' storm and snow,
Down the valley, 'Gloria'!

'Lay the axe at my young stem now!'
Woodman, woodman, sing 'Nowell.'
'Set a star on every bough!'
In Excelsis Gloria!
'Hall and cot shall see me stand,'
Rich and poor man, sing 'Nowell'!
'Giver of gifts from Elfin-land.'
Oberon, answer 'Gloria.'

'On my boughs, on mine, on mine,'
Father and mother, sing 'Nowell'!
'All the fruits of the earth shall twine.'
Bending low with 'Gloria.'
'Sword of wood and doll of wax'
Little children, sing 'Nowell'!
'Swing on the stem was cleft with the axe!'
Craftsmen all, a 'Gloria.'

'Hear! I have looked on the other side,'
Out of the East, O sing 'Nowell'!
'Because to live this night I died!'
Into the West with 'Gloria.'
'Hear! In this lighted room I have found'
Ye that seek, O sing 'Nowell'!
'The spell that worketh underground.'
Ye that doubt a 'Gloria.'

'I have found it, even I,'
Ye that are lowly, sing 'Nowell'!
'The secret of this alchemy!'
Ye that are poor, a 'Gloria.'
'Look, your tinsel turneth to gold,'
Sing Nowell! Nowell! Nowell!
'Your dust to a hand for love to hold!'
In Excelsis Gloria.

'Hung by the hilt on your Christmas-tree'
Little children, sing 'Nowell'!
'Your wooden sword is a cross for me.'
Emperors, a 'Gloria.'
'I have found that fabulous stone'
Ocean-worthies, cry 'Nowell'!
'Which turneth all things into one.'
Wise men all, a 'Gloria.'

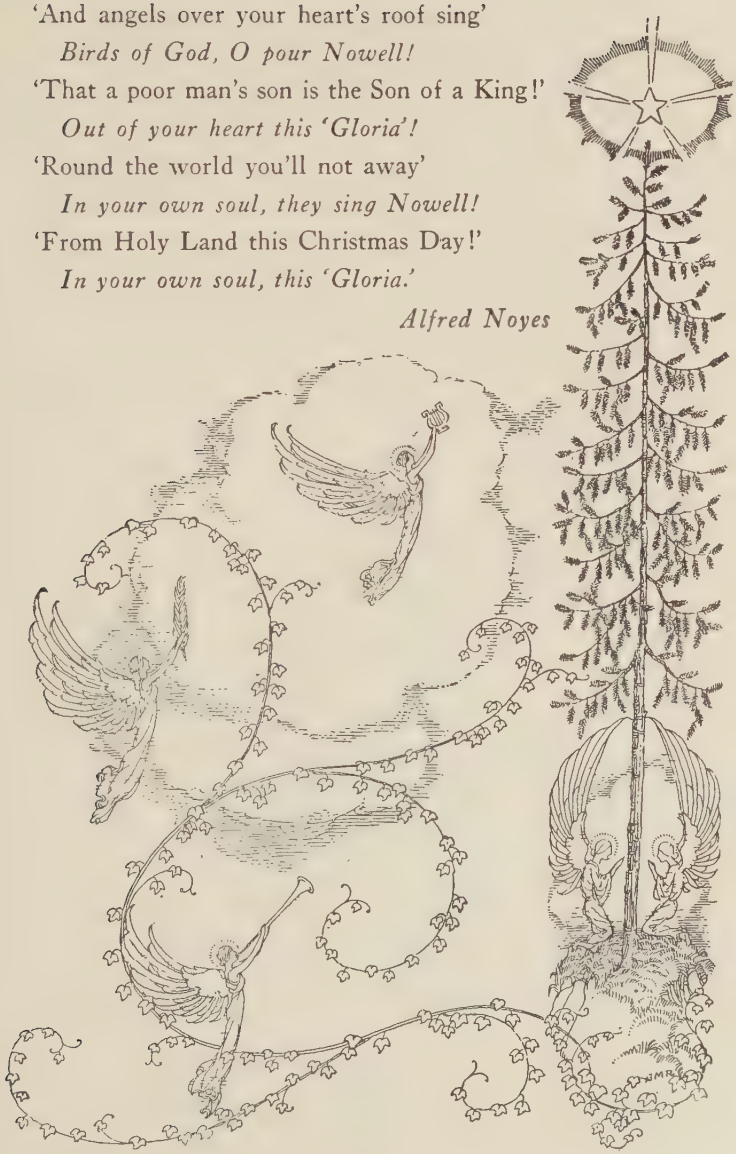
'It is not ruby nor anything'
Jeweller, jeweller, sing 'Nowell'!
'Fit for the crown of an earthly king:'
In Excelsis Gloria!
'It is not here! It is not there!'
Traveller, rest and cry 'Nowell'!
'It is one thing and everywhere!'
Heaven and Earth sing 'Gloria.'

'It is the earth, the moon, the sun,'
Mote in the sunbeam, sing 'Nowell'!
'And all the stars that march as one,'
In Excelsis Gloria!
'Here, by the touch of it, I can see'
Sing, O Life, a sweet Nowell!
'The world's King die on a Christmas-tree.'
Answer, Death, with 'Gloria.'

'Here, not set in a realm apart,'
East and West are one 'Nowell'!
'Holy Land is in your heart!'
North and South one 'Gloria'!
'Death is a birth, birth is a death,'
Love is all, O sing Nowell!
'And London one with Nazareth.'
And all the World a 'Gloria.'

'And angels over your heart's roof sing'
Birds of God, O pour Nowell!
'That a poor man's son is the Son of a King!'
Out of your heart this 'Gloria'!
'Round the world you'll not away'
In your own soul, they sing Nowell!
'From Holy Land this Christmas Day!'
In your own soul, this 'Gloria.'

Alfred Noyes



Christmas Communion

COME in, dear Babe, and rest!
Cold is the night and keen;
Here is no Mother with her milky breast,
Her long hair's silken screen,
To hide from Thee the stable, poor and mean.

There are no angel-folk
Hung between Heaven and earth,
Making the night a glory, and no flock
Of stars that sing for mirth
Because of the wonderful, long-looked for Birth.

It is so dark and cold,
Colder than Bethlehem was;
Here are no sheets with lavender in fold,
Nor even the pleachéd grass.
Cold as a stone, cold is my heart, alas!

But two gaunt beasts are here,
Not meet for Thy delight;
Ox of my appetites, misspent and drear,
Ass of my folly light,
Hanging their heads, Thy courtiers are to-night.

Not like those innocent things
That shook the bed for Thee;
Here are no shepherd men, here are no kings
With gifts in their degree;
Cold, bare, and empty, yet wilt come to me?

Cold as the clay, and hard,
Yet wilt Thou come as of yore?
I who have neither gold nor spikenard,
Thou Hope as long before!
For Thee, for Thee, the stable waits once more.

Katharine Tynan

Babushka

(A Russian Legend)

BABUSHKA sits before the fire
Upon a winter's night;
The driving winds heap up the snow,
Her hut is snug and tight;
The howling winds,—they only make
Babushka's more bright!

She hears a knocking at the door:
So late—who can it be?
She hastes to lift the wooden latch,
No thought of fear has she;
The wind-blown candle in her hand
Shines out on strangers three.

Their beards are white with age, and snow
That in the darkness flies;
Their floating locks are long and white,
But kindly are their eyes
That sparkle underneath their brows,
Like stars in frosty skies.

"Babushka, we have come from far,
We tarry but to say,
A little Prince is born this night,
Who all the world shall sway.
Come join the search; come, go with us,
Who go our gifts to pay."

Babushka shivers at the door;
"I would I might behold
The little Prince who shall be King
But ah! the night is cold,
The wind so fierce, the snow so deep,
And I, good sirs, am old."

The strangers three, no word they speak,
But fade in snowy space!
Babushka sits before her fire,
And dreams, with wistful face:
"I would that I had questioned them,
So I the way might trace!

"When morning comes with blessed light,
I'll early be awake;
My staff in hand I'll go,—perchance,
Those strangers I'll o'ertake;
And, for the Child some little toys
I'll carry, for His sake."

The morning came, and, staff in hand,
She wandered in the snow,
She asked the way of all she met,
But none the way could show.
"It must be farther yet," she sighed;
"Then farther will I go."

And still, 'tis said, on Christmas Eve,
When high the drifts are piled,
With staff, with basket on her arm,
Babushka seeks the Child:
At every door her face is seen,—
Her wistful face and mild!

Her gifts at every door she leaves;
She bends, and murmurs low,
Above each little face half-hid
By pillows white as snow:
"And is He here?" Then, softly sighs,
"Nay, farther must I go!"

Edith M. Thomas

Christ's Nativity

AWAKE, glad heart! get up and sing!
It is the birthday of thy King.
Awake! Awake!
The sun doth shake
Light from his locks, and all the way
Breathing perfumes, doth spice the day.

Awake! awake! hark how th' wood rings,
Winds whisper, and the busy springs
A concert make.
Awake! Awake!
Man is their high priest, and should rise
To offer up the sacrifice.

I would I were some bird, or star,
Fluttering in woods, or lifted far
Above this inn
And road of sin;
Then either star or bird should be
Shining or singing still to Thee.

I would I had in my best part
Fit rooms for Thee! or that my heart
Were so clean as
Thy manger was!
But I am all filth, and obscene;
Yet, if Thou wilt, Thou can'st make me clean.

Sweet Jesu! will then. Let no more
This leper haunt and soil Thy door!
Cure him, ease him,
O release him!
And let once more, by mystic birth,
The Lord of life be born in earth.

Henry Vaughan

SOME sayes, that ever 'gainst that Season comes
Wherein our Saviour's Birth is celebrated,
The Bird of Dawning singeth all night long:
And then (they say) no Spirit can walke abroad,
The nights are wholesome, then no Planets strike,
No Faiery talkes, nor Witch hath power to Charme:
So hallowed, and so gracious is the time.

William Shakespeare

THE time draws near the birth of Christ:
The moon is hid; the night is still;
The Christmas bells from hill to hill
Answer each other in the mist.

Four voices of four hamlets round,
From far and near, on mead and moor,
Swell out and fail, as if a door
Were shut between me and the sound:

Each voice four changes on the wind,
That now dilate, and now decrease,
Peace and goodwill, goodwill and peace,
Peace and goodwill, to all mankind.

Alfred Tennyson

A Christmas Carol

"WHAT means this glory round our feet,"
The Magi mused, "more bright than morn?"
And voices chanted clear and sweet,
"To-day the Prince of Peace is born!"

"What means that star," the Shepherds said,
"That brightens through the rocky glen?"
And angels, answering overhead,
Sang, "Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

'Tis eighteen hundred years and more
Since those sweet oracles were dumb;
We wait for Him, like them of yore;
Alas, He seems so slow to come!

But it was said, in words of gold,
No time or sorrow e'er shall dim,
That little children might be bold
In perfect trust to come to Him.

All round about our feet shall shine
A light like that the wise men saw,
If we our loving wills incline
To that sweet Life which is the Law.

So shall we learn to understand
  The simple faith of shepherds then,
And, clasping kindly hand in hand,
  Sing, "Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

But they who do their souls no wrong,
  But keep at eve the faith of morn,
Shall daily hear the angel-song,
  "To-day the Prince of Peace is born!"

James Russell Lowell

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His Birthday

THE day the Christ-child's tender eyes
Unveiled their beauty on the earth,
God lit a new star in the skies
To flash the message of His birth;
And wise men read the glowing sign,
And came to greet the Child divine.

Low kneeling in the stable's gloom,
Their precious treasures they unrolled;
The place was rich with sweet perfume;
Upon the floor lay gifts of gold.
And thus adoring they did bring
To Christ the earliest offering.

I think no nimbus wreathed the head
Of the young King so rudely throned;
The quilt of hay beneath Him spread
The sleepy kine beside Him owned;
And here and there in the torn thatch
The sky thrust in a starry patch.

Oh, when was new-born monarch shrined
Within such canopy as this?
The birds have cradles feather lined;
And for their new babes princesses
Have sheets of lace without a flaw,—
His pillow was a wisp of straw!

He chose this way, it may have been,
That those poor mothers, everywhere,
Whose babies in the world's great inn
Find scanty cradle-room and fare,
As did the babe of Bethlehem,
May find somewhat to comfort them.

May Riley Smith

Christmas Bells

I HEARD the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The wrong shall fail,
The right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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Be Merry

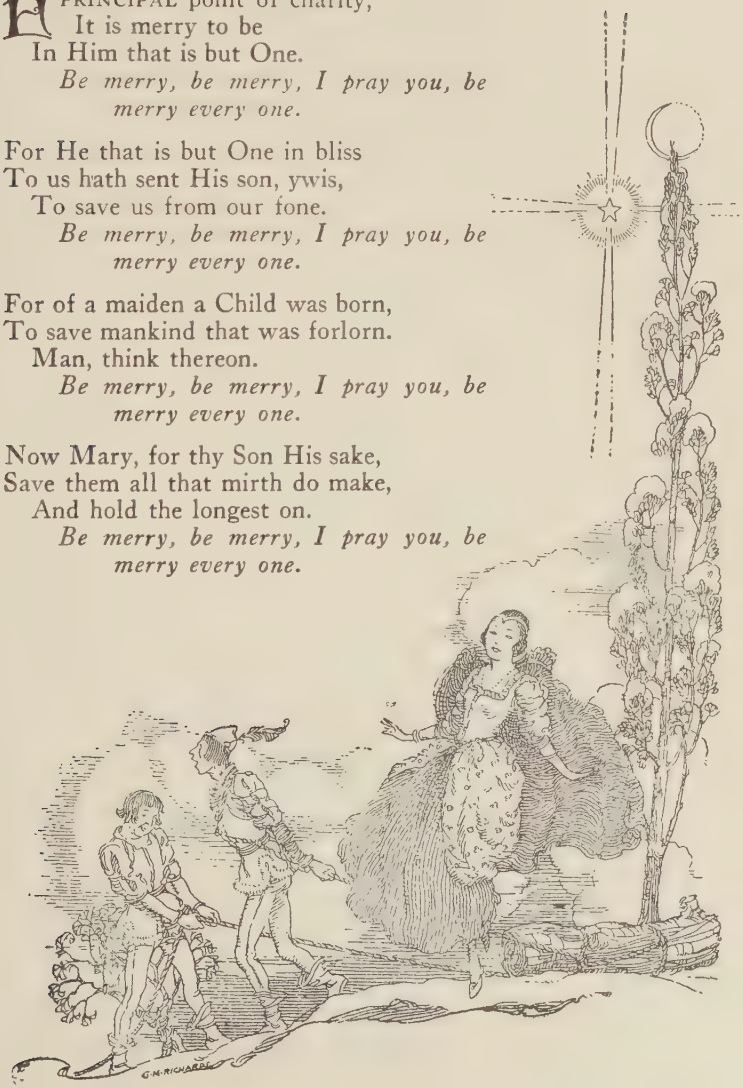
Be merry, be merry, I pray you, be merry every one.

A PRINCIPAL point of charity,
It is merry to be
In Him that is but One.
Be merry, be merry, I pray you, be merry every one.

For He that is but One in bliss
To us hath sent His son, ywis,
To save us from our fone.
Be merry, be merry, I pray you, be merry every one.

For of a maiden a Child was born,
To save mankind that was forlorn.
Man, think thereon.
Be merry, be merry, I pray you, be merry every one.

Now Mary, for thy Son His sake,
Save them all that mirth do make,
And hold the longest on.
Be merry, be merry, I pray you, be merry every one.



The Holly and the Ivy

THE holly and the ivy
Now are both well grown;
Of all the trees that are in the wood
The holly bears the crown.
The rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a blossom
As white as lily flower;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
To be our sweet Saviour.
The rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a berry,
As red as any blood;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good.
The rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a prickle
As sharp as any thorn;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas day in the morn.
The rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a bark
As bitter as any gall;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all.
The rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly and the ivy
Now are both well grown;
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.
The rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

Anonymous

A Christmas Caroll, sung to the King in the Presence at White-Hall

Chorus:

WHAT sweeter musick can we bring,
Then a Caroll, for to sing
The Birth of this our heavenly King?
Awake the Voice! Awake the String!
Heart, Eare, and Eye, and every thing
Awake! the while the active Finger
Runs division with the Singer.

From the Flourish they came to the Song.

I. Dark and dull night, flie hence away,
And give the honour to this Day,
That sees *December* turn'd to *May*.

II. If we may ask the reason, say;
The why, and wherefore all things here
Seem like the Spring-time of the yeere?

III. Why do's the chilling Winters morne
Smile, like a field beset with corne?
Or smell, like to a Meade new-shorne,
Thus, on the sudden?

IV. Come and see
The cause, why things thus fragrant be:
'Tis He is borne, whose quickning Birth
Gives life and luster, publike mirth,
To Heaven, and the under-Earth.

Chorus:

We see Him come, and know him ours,
Who, with His Sun-shine, and His showers,
Turnes all the patient ground to flowers.

I. The Darling of the world is come,
And fit it is, we finde a roome
To welcome Him.

II. The nobler part
Of all the house here, is the heart,

Chorus:

Which we will give Him; and bequeath
This Hollie, and this Ivie Wreath,
To do Him honour; who's our King,
And Lord of all this Revelling.

Robert Herrick

A Country Carol

WHERE the patient oxen were, by the ass's stall,
Watching my Lord's manger knelt the waking cattle all;
'Twas a little country maid vigil by him kept—
All among the country things my good Lord slept.
Fair was Rome the city on that early Christmas morn,
Yet among the country-folk was my Lord born!

Country-lads that followed Him, blithe they were and kind,
It was only city-folk were hard to Him and blind:
Ay, He told of lilies, and of grain and grass that grew,
Fair things of the summer fields my good Lord knew,
By the hedgerows' flowering there He laid His head—
It was in the country that my Lord was bred.

When the cross weighed down on him, on the grievous road,
'Twas a kindly countryman raised my good Lord's load;
Peasant-girls of Galilee, folk of Nazareth,
These were fain to follow Him down the ways of death—
Yea, beyond a city wall, underneath the sky,
Out in open country did my good Lord die.

When he rose to Heaven on that white Ascension day
Last from open country did my good Lord pass away;
Rows of golden seraphim watched where He should dwell,
Yet it was the country-folk had my Lord's farewell:
Out above the flowered hill, from the mossy grass,
Up from open country did my good Lord pass.

Where the jeweled minsters are, where the censers sway,
There they kneel to Christ the Lord on this His bearing-day:
But I shall stay to greet Him where the bonny fields begin,
Like the fields that once my good Lord wandered in,
Where His thorn-tree flowered once, where His sparrows soared,
In the open country-land of my good Lord!

Margaret Widdemer

THERE was a gentle hostler
(And blessed be his name!)
He opened up the stable
The night Our Lady came.
Our Lady and Saint Joseph,
He gave them food and bed,
And Jesus Christ has given him
A glory round his head.

So let the gate swing open
However poor the yard,
Lest weary people visit you
And find their passage barred.
Unlatch the door at midnight
And let your lantern's glow
Shine out to guide the traveller's feet
To you across the snow.

There was a courteous hostler
(He is in Heaven to-night!)
He held Our Lady's bridle
And helped her to alight,
He spread clean straw before her
Whereon she might lie down,
And Jesus Christ has given him
An everlasting crown.

Unlock the door this evening
And let the gate swing wide,
Let all who ask for shelter
Come speedily inside
What if your yard be narrow?
What if your house be small?
There is a Guest is coming
Will glorify it all.

There was a joyous hostler
Who knelt on Christmas morn
Beside the radiant manger
Wherein his Lord was born.
His heart was full of laughter,
His soul was full of bliss
When Jesus, on His mother's lap,
Gave him His hand to kiss.

Unbar your heart this evening
And keep no stranger out,
Take from your soul's great portal
The barrier of doubt.
To humble folk and weary
Give hearty welcoming,
Your breast shall be to-morrow
The cradle of a King. *Joyce Kilmer*

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Star of My Heart

STAR of my heart, I follow from afar.
Sweet Love on high, lead on where shepherds are,
Where Time is not, and only dreamers are.
Star from of old, the Magi-Kings are dead
And a foolish Saxon seeks the manger-bed.
O lead me to Jehovah's child
Across this dreamland lone and wild.
Then I will speak this prayer unsaid,
And kiss his little haloed head—
"My star and I, we love thee, little child."

Except the Christ be born agaín to-night
In dreams of all men, saints and sons of shame,
The world will never see his kingdom bright.
Stars of all hearts, lead onward thro' the night
Past death-black deserts, doubts without a name,
Past hills of pain and mountains of new sin
To that far sky where mystic births begin,
Where dreaming ears the angel-song shall win.
Our Christmas shall be rare at dawning there,
And each shall find his brother fair,
Like a little child within:
All hearts of the earth shall find new birth
And wake, no more to sin.

Vachel Lindsay

Peace on Earth

He took a frayed hat from his head,
And "Peace on Earth" was what he said.
"A morsel out of what you're worth,
And there we have it: Peace on Earth.
Not much, although a little more
Than what there was on earth before
I'm as you see, I'm Ichabod,—
But never mind the ways I've trod;
I'm sober now, so help me God."

I could not pass the fellow by.
"Do you believe in God?" said I;
"And is there to be Peace on Earth?"

"Tonight we celebrate the birth,"
He said, "of One who died for men;
The Son of God, we say. What then?
Your God, or mine? I'd make you laugh
Were I to tell you even half
That I have learned of mine today
Where yours would hardly seem to stay.
Could He but follow in and out
Some anthropoids I know about,
The god to whom you may have prayed
Might see a world He never made."

"Your words are flowing full," said I;
"But yet they give me no reply;
Your fountain might as well be dry."

"A wiser One than you, my friend,
Would wait and hear me to the end;
And for his eyes a light would shine
Through this unpleasant shell of mine
That in your fancy makes of me
A Christmas curiosity.
All right, I might be worse than that;
And you might now be lying flat;
I might have done it from behind,
And taken what there was to find.
Don't worry, for I'm not that kind.
'Do I believe in God?' Is that
The price tonight of a new hat?
Has he commanded that his name
Be written everywhere the same?
Have all who live in every place
Identified his hidden face?
Who knows but he may like as well
My story as one you may tell?
And if he show me there be Peace
On Earth, as there be fields and trees
Outside a jail-yard, am I wrong
If now I sing him a new song?
Your world is in yourself, my friend,
For your endurance to the end;
And all the Peace there is on Earth

Is faith in what your world is worth,
And saying, without any lies,
Your world could not be otherwise."

"One might say that and then be shot,"
I told him; and he said: "Why not?"
I ceased, and gave him rather more
Than he was counting of my store.
"And since I have it, thanks to you,
Don't ask me what I mean to do,"
Said he. "Believe that even I
Would rather tell the truth than lie—
On Christmas Eve. No matter why."

His unshaved, educated face,
His inextinguishable grace.
And his hard smile, are with me still,
Deplore the vision as I will;
For whatsoever he be at,
So droll a derelict as that
Should have at least another hat.

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Christmas Trees

(A Christmas Circular Letter)

THE city had withdrawn into itself
And left at last the country to the country;
When between whirls of snow not come to lie
And whirls of foliage not yet laid, there drove
A stranger to our yard, who looked the city,
Yet did in country fashion in that there
He sat and waited till he drew us out
A-buttoning coats to ask him who he was.
He proved to be the city come again
To look for something it had left behind
And could not do without and keep its Christmas.
He asked if I would sell my Christmas trees;
My woods—the young fir balsams like a place
Where houses all are churches and have spires.
I hadn't thought of them as Christmas Trees.
I doubt if I was tempted for a moment
To sell them off their feet to go in cars
And leave the slope behind the house all bare,
Where the sunshines now no warmer than the moon.
I'd hate to have them know it if I was.
Yet more I'd hate to hold my trees except
As others hold theirs or refuse for them,
Beyond the time of profitable growth,
The trial by market everything must come to.
I dallied so much with the thought of selling.
Then whether from mistaken courtesy
And fear of seeming short of speech, or whether

From hope of hearing good of what was mine,
I said, "There aren't enough to be worth while."

"I could soon tell how many they would cut,
You let me look them over."
"You could look.
But don't expect I'm going to let you have them."
Pasture they spring in, some in clumps too close
That lop each other of boughs, but not a few
Quite solitary and having equal boughs
All round and round. The latter he nodded "Yes" to,
Or paused to say beneath some lovelier one,
I thought so too, but wasn't there to say so.
We climbed the pasture on the south, crossed over,
And came down on the north.
He said, "A thousand."

"A thousand Christmas trees!—at what apiece?"

He felt some need of softening that to me:
"A thousand trees would come to thirty dollars."

Then I was certain I had never meant
To let him have them. Never show surprise!
But thirty dollars seemed so small beside
The extent of pasture I should strip, three cents
(For that was all they figured out apiece)

Three cents so small beside the dollar friends
I should be writing to within the hour
Would pay in cities for good trees like those,
Regular vestry-trees whole Sunday Schools
Could hang enough on to pick off enough.

A thousand Christmas trees I didn't know I had!
Worth three cents more to give away than sell,
As may be shown by a simple calculation.
Too bad I couldn't lay one in a letter.
I can't help wishing I could send you one,
In wishing you herewith a Merry Christmas.

Robert Frost

Holly Carol

TOWARD the doors of lonely folk
And such as wait in dread
The Christ-child comes to us
With holly round His head,

Light He brings and laughter
And a bright holly-wreath
To show them how the thorn-leaves
Have scarlet fruit beneath,

And where there is happiness
And none who need mourn
He stands on their pathways
With his wreath of thorn;

He stands in their doorways
Where joy is in the air
With holly for a prick to those
Who have joy to share—

He comes to men's hearthstones,
Telling all of them
How that joy and sorrow
Flourish on one stem;

The holly is a bright promise
That hearts need not break,
The holly is a gift to us
To keep joy awake;

Early Christmas morning
When first dawn is shed
The Christ Child comes to us
With holly round His head.

Margaret Widdemer

A Christmas Carmen

SOUND over all waters, reach out from all lands,
The chorus of voices the clasping of hands;
Sing hymns that were sung by the stars of the morn,
Sing songs of the angels when Jesus was born!
With glad jubilations
Bring hope to the nations!
The dark night is ending and dawn has begun:
Rise, hope of the ages, arise like the sun,
All speech flow to music, all hearts beat as one!

Sing the bridal of nations! with chorals of love;
Sing out the war-vulture and sing in the dove,
Till the hearts of the peoples keep time in accord,
And the voice of the world is the voice of the Lord!
Clasp hands of the nations
In strong gratulations:
The dárk night is ending and dawn has begun;
Rise, hope of the ages, arise like the sun.
All speech flow to music, all hearts beat as one!

Blow, bugles of battle, the marches of peace;
East, west, north and south, let the long quarrel cease:
Sing the song of great joy that the angels began,
Sing of glory to God and of good-will to man!
Hark! joining in chorus
The heavens bend o'er us!

The dark night is ending and dawn has begun;
Rise, hope of all ages, arise like the sun,
All speech flow to music, all hearts beat as one!

John Greenleaf Whittier

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Christmas After War

SHALL misery make mirth,
Lord of our disbelief?
What gift of joy has earth?
Bring me your grief.

How shall old fables heal
Our world of woe and sin?
When you through fable feel
The truth within.

There is no guiding star;
The heavens are black and blind.
The Magi journeyed far;
So must mankind.

What singing angels press
Bright wings down these wild skies?
Courage and Faithfulness
And Sacrifice.

Madonna? Child? Are we
Shepherds to seek for them?
Love! Peace! Let your heart be
Their Bethlehem.

Katharine Lee Bates

Courtesy

Of Courtesy, it is much less
Than Courage of Heart or Holiness,
Yet in my Walks it seems to me
That the Grace of God is in Courtesy.

On Monks I did in Storrington fall,
They took me straight into their Hall;
I saw Three Pictures on a wall,
And Courtesy was in them all.

The first the Annunciation;
The second the Visitation;
The third the Consolation,
Of God that was Our Lady's Son.

The first was of Saint Gabriel;
On wings a-flame from Heaven he fell;
And as he went upon one knee
He shone with Heavenly courtesy.

Our Lady out of Nazareth rode—
It was her month of heavy load;
Yet was Her face both great and kind,
For Courtesy was in Her Mind.

The third it was our Little Lord,
Whom all the Kings in arms adored;
He was so small you could not see
His large intent of Courtesy.

Our Lord, that was Our Lady's Son,
Go bless you, People, one by one;
My Rhyme is written, my work is done.

Hilaire Belloc

The First Nowell the Angel did say

Traditional.

THE first nowell the angel did say
Was to three poor shepherds in the fields as they lay,
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
In a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the East beyond them far,
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

And by the light of that same star
Three Wise Men came from country far;
To seek for a King was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

The star drew nigh to the North-West,
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
And there it did both stop and stay
Right over the place where Jesus lay.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

Then did they know assuredly
Within that house the King did lie;
One entered in then for to see,
And found the Babe in poverty.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

Then entered in those Wise Men three
Most reverently upon their knee,
And offered there in his presence
Both gold and myrrh and frankincense.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

Between an ox-stall and an ass
This Child truly there born He was;
For want of clothing they did Him lay
All in the manger, among the hay.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made heaven and earth of nought,
And with His blood mankind hath bought.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

If we in our time shall do well,
We shall be free from death and hell;
For God has preparëd for us all
A resting place in general.

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born upon this day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on
Christmas Day.

In Bethlehem in Jewry
This blessed babe was born,
And laid within a manger
Upon this blessed morn;
The which His mother Mary
Nothing did take in scorn.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on
Christmas Day.

From God our heavenly Father
A blessed angel came,
And unto certain shepherds
Brought tidings of the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by name.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on
Christmas Day.

"Fear not," then said the angel,
"Let nothing you affright,
This day is born a Saviour
Of virtue, power, and might;
So frequently to vanquish all
The friends of Satan quite."

O tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on
Christmas Day.

The shepherds at those tidings
Rejoicëd much in mind,
And left their flocks a-feeding
In tempest, storm, and wind,
And went to Bethlehem straightway,
This blessed Babe to find.

O tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on
Christmas Day.

But when to Bethlehem they came,
Whereas this Infant lay,
They found Him in a manger
Where oxen feed on hay;
His mother Mary kneeling
Unto the Lord did pray.

O tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on
Christmas Day.

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas
All others doth deface.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on
Christmas Day.

Hymn for Christmas Day

Being a Dialogue Between Three Shepherds

WHERE is this blessed Babe
That hath made
All the world so full of joy
And expectation;
That glorious Boy
That crowns each nation
With a triumphant wreath of blessedness?

Where should He be but in the throng,
And among
His angel ministers that sing
And take wing
Just as may echo to His voice,
And rejoice
When wing and tongue and all
May so procure their happiness?

But He hath other waiters now:
A poor cow,
An ox and mule, stand and behold,
And wonder
That a stable should enfold
Him that can thunder.
Chorus. O what a gracious God have we,
How good! how great! even as our misery.

Jeremy Taylor

Carol: New Style

If Jesus Christ should come again,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day,
To bother the minds of gentlemen
On Christmas day in the morning?

The first one said as he passed by,
As he passed by, as he passed by,
"I see three thieves a-hanging high,
This Christmas day in the morning."

The second one said, "What sinful men!
What sinful men, what sinful men!
Hanging is too good for them,
On Christmas day in the morning."

The third one said, "Oh stay your word!
Stay your word, oh stay your word!
Do you not see that one's the Lord,
This Christmas day in the morning?"

"I know him by his weary head,
His weary head, his weary head."
Whereat they all fell sore adread,
That Christmas day in the morning.

"How sad this is we all avow,
Yes indeed, we all avow!
But what shall we do about it now,
On Christmas day in the morning?"

Primus
"I'll run away as fast as I may,
As fast as I may, as fast as I may,
And pretend I haven't been out all day,
On Christmas day in the morning."

Secundus
"I'll buy Him a shroud that's spick and span,
Spick and span, spick and span,
For I was always a generous man,
On Christmas day in the morning."

Tertius
"But what if we should cut Him down,
Cut Him down, cut Him down?"

Secundus et Primus
"You fool, do you want to arouse the town,
On Christmas day in the morning?"

"My speech was rash," the third one said,
The third one said, the third one said,
"We're surer of God when we know He's dead,
On any day in the morning."

They knelt in the snow and prayed and bowed,
Prayed and bowed, prayed and bowed,
And the two dead thieves laughed out aloud
On Christmas day in the morning.

As Jesus Christ was hanging high,
Hanging high, hanging high,
He saw three Christians, passing by,
On Christmas day in the morning.

Stephen Vincent Benét.

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The House of Christmas

THERE fared a mother driven forth
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless
All men are at home.
The crazy stable close at hand,
With shaking timber and shifting sand,
Grew a stronger thing to abide and stand
Than the square stones of Rome.

For men are homesick in their homes,
And strangers under the sun,
And they lay their heads in a foreign land
Whenever the day is done.
Here we have battle and blazing eyes,
And chance and honour and high surprise,
But our homes are under miraculous skies
Where the yule tale was begun.

A Child in a foul stable,
Where the beasts feed and foam;
Only where He was homeless
Are you and I at home;
We have hands that fashion and heads that know,
But our hearts we lost—how long ago!
In a place no chart nor ship can show
Under the sky's dome.

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This world is wild as an old wives' tale,
And strange the plain things are,
The earth is enough and the air is enough
For our wonder and our war;
But our rest is as far as the fire-drake swings
And our peace is put in impossible things
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable wings
Round an incredible star.

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.

G. K. Chesterton

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NOTE. The carols called "Out of Your Sleep Arise And Wake," "What Tidings?" "This Day," "Be Merry" and "The Holly And The Ivy" are taken from "Ancient English Christmas Carols," Chatto & Windus.

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